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Sermons for every Sunday in the year and for the leading holidays of ...

William Gahan,
James O'Leary



GAHAN'S SÈRMONS.

S E R M O N S

FOR

EVERY SUNDAY IN THE YEAR,

AND FOR THE

LEADING HOLIDAYS OF OBLIGATION.

BY

REV. WILLIAM GAHAN.

EX. PROV., O. S. A.

WITH A PREFACE BY

THE RIGHT REV. BISHOP WALSH, D. D., OF HALIFAX, N. S.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED

AN INDEX OF REFERENCES AND A SYNOPSIS
OF EACH DISCOURSE.

EDITED BY REV. JAMES O'LEARY, D. D.

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EDITOR'S PREFACE.

THE age of Father GAHAN, being the last quarter of the last century, is remarkable for a number of political orators in Ireland, scarcely surpassed in any land within the same space of time. The name of GAHAN may be joined with them as a religious orator. His style is fervid and magniloquent, like the Fathers of old, and his thoughts, method of thinking are modeled after the great orators of France.

Of course, *Gahan's Sermons* must be presented as *Gahan's Sermons*, without any substantial change; but several inaccuracies of expression, as well as errors in capitalizing, spelling, and punctuation have been corrected. Preachers will here find a sermon for every Sunday in the year, a sermon for every Holiday of Obligation, as far as one can be supplied from GAHAN, and the most useful and important of his remaining discourses.

Before each discourse preachers will find a synopsis, to place the main divisions of the subject-matter before the mind, whether they wish to follow Gahan's method of presenting them or not.

• There is added at the end an *Index of References*, by means of which the preacher may immediately find out the thoughts of Father GAHAN on any subject. This will be very useful to preachers who have short discourses to deliver, as a sub-

division in *Gahan's Sermons* may be long enough for a whole sermon in many cases.

The present issue of *Gahan's Sermons* has been read three times : first to mark the subdivisions of each discourse, next to revise the proofs, and again to make out the *Index of References*.

The *Preface* by Right Rev. Bishop Walsh is an evidence of the orthodoxy and Catholic spirit of the Sermons. I am willing to bear testimony to the correctness of the present edition.

J. O'L.

PREFACE BY RIGHT REV. BISHOP WALSH.

It has long been a source of regret to every lover of religion, that the numerous duties and unceasing labors of the Irish American Clergy render it impossible for them to devote much of their valuable time to the composition or publication of good books. Though our National Church is filled with accomplished scholars, eloquent preachers, and able divines, we behold very few works on religion issuing from the Irish press.

This, however, is a state of things which must excite our regret rather than our surprise. For as long as the clergy are so utterly disproportioned in number to the millions whom they have to instruct and attend, it will be in vain to hope, that that precious time which is altogether consumed in the essential duties of the mission, can be directed to other purposes, no matter how laudable.

In no religious department are we more deficient than in the amount of published Sermons; and yet, perhaps, it would be impossible to hear, throughout the Catholic world, more beautiful or sublime specimens of Christian eloquence than are weekly delivered in our Churches. In other Catholic countries the greatest care has been taken to collect and publish the Sermons and Discourses of their distinguished preachers and moralists, and their religious zeal is thus made known to Christendom, and preserved for the admiration of posterity. In Ireland, though the eloquence of her sons is proverbial, and their zeal as undying as their faith, the rich treasures of their learning and piety descend with them to the grave, and nought is left behind but the remembrance of their virtues, in the grateful hearts of those whom they had edified by their example, and instructed by their doctrine.

But, thank God, an improvement in this respect is taking place. Ages of persecution have rolled by, and an era of toleration has at length commenced. The public celebration of Catholic service is not only permitted, but protected by law. Temples in some manner worthy of the Divine Majesty to whom they are consecrated are seen to lift their heads to heaven in every direction through the land. The generosity of the faithful keeps pace with the zeal of the clergy, and we everywhere witness abundant proofs of that piety which loves to decorate the House of God. His ministers are clothed in garments suitable to the dignity of their high office, and the affecting ceremonies of religion are conducted with a pomp and splendor unknown in Ireland since the glorious days when she earned from admiring Christendom the proud appellation of ISLAND OF SAINTS.

Our religious literature shares in the general improvement. Works of piety are beginning to be sent forth in great numbers from the Irish American press; scarce and valuable books are reprinted, translations from foreign writers of eminence, and original compositions of great merit are ushered into public notice in quick succession, and at moderate prices. The supply and demand are producing a mutual reaction, which must be highly conducive to the religious information of the people, and the glory of our National Church.

It must not be inferred from the preceding remarks, that there were not in the worst of times splendid exceptions, amid the general decay of religious literature in our island. There is hardly a country of Europe, or a department of ecclesiastical learning in which Irishmen have not distinguished themselves and reflected glory on their country. Even at home, the national talent has burst forth in brilliant coruscations amid the dismal gloom of persecution, and the watchmen of Israel, men mighty in word and work, have bravely stood upon her towers, and repelled the powerful and implacable enemies who invested her, by the invincible weapons of truth.

The pious and learned author of the following Sermons is

entitled to rank high amongst these distinguished champions of the faith. The name of GAHAN will be long enshrined in the grateful memory of every Irish Catholic. His various works of piety and learning were the instruction and delight of the age in which he lived. He wrote and published a succession of highly useful volumes, which were peculiarly seasonable at the time of their appearance, and which are still held in great and deserved esteem by the pious faithful. His Sermons, of which the following pages are a reprint, contain a vast fund of morality, and are equally suited to the humble and learned Catholic. GAHAN preached the doctrine of his Heavenly Master, not "in the persuasive words of human wisdom," but "in the showing of the spirit and the power" of God—(1 Cor. ii. 4.) He spoke and wrote from the fervor of his own heart, and with a penetrating unction, for which all human eloquence might be substituted in vain.

It is unnecessary to inform the Irish American, that his doctrine was but a transcript of his life. Many witnesses of his virtues are yet living ; so that if he had not bequeathed to his countrymen those legacies of his piety, his name would still live green in their memories. The language of the Holy Ghost, concerning Abel, may be also applied to him : "Although dead, he still speaketh," (Heb. xi. 4,) by the force of his example, and the recollection of his piety, and the valuable instructions contained in his writings.

An edition of his excellent Sermons is here presented to the public. From the entire exhaustion of the Irish edition, and the increasing demands of the faithful, the publishers feel that they will render an acceptable service to the friends of religion by the printing of this. They also venture to hope that its type, arrangement, and size will meet with general approbation.

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SERMONS
FOR
EVERY SUNDAY OF THE YEAR
AND
EVERY HOLIDAY OF OBLIGATION.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

ON THE GENERAL JUDGMENT.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. The importance, justification, and time of the General Judgment.
- II. Its terrors, with illustrations from the Deluge, Sinai, and the dissolution of the elements
- III. The Valley of Josaphat.
- IV. The first coming, present providence, and future judgment of Christ.
- V. The sentence and peroration.

Tunc videbunt Filium Hominis venientem in nube, cum protestate magna et majestate.—Luc., c. xxi. v. 27.

Then they shall see the Son of Man coming in a cloud, with great power and majesty.—Luke, c. xxi. v. 27.

THIS being the first Sunday of Advent, the Church, in order to inspire her children with that penitential spirit which is suitable to this holy time, presents one of the most terrifying truths of the Christian Religion, and proposes to our serious consideration the tremendous mystery of the general judgment, which is to decide whether we are to be the happiest or most unhappy creatures that God can make us; whether heaven, with all its infinite joys, or hell, with all its inconceivable torments, is to be our everlasting inheritance; whether we are for ever to sing joyful Alleluias with the blessed choirs of angels and saints above, or to burn eternally in flames, with legions of merciless devils below. The condemnation of the rich glutton who was buried in hell at the time of his death, as the Gospel informs us, and the happy end of poor Lazarus, who was immediately translated into Abraham's bosom

when he departed this life, plainly show that the soul undergoes a particular judgment, the very instant that death separates it from the body. But besides this particular judgment, there is a day of general judgment, appointed by God, for all mankind to appear together before the awful tribunal of Jesus Christ.

Divines assign various reasons for the necessity of this universal judgment: first, in order to manifest the power of Jesus Christ, and to justify before all men the conduct of God's providence, which often sends riches and prosperity to the wicked in this life, and visits the just with adversity and afflictions; secondly, to separate the good from the bad, and to reward the one and condemn the other publicly, in the face of all mankind: thirdly, to augment the glory of the elect, and the confusion of the reprobate, in proportion to their respective merits or demerits; fourthly, a general judgment is necessary, that the bodies both of the just and the wicked may receive their sentence, and that every one may be recompensed *according to the very things he has done in the flesh, whether good or evil*, as the Apostle speaks, 2 Cor. v. 10; for the justice of God requires that the bodies should be judged as well as the souls, and that they be made partakers either of eternal glory or eternal punishment, either as they have been instruments of virtue or instruments of vice in this life.

The particular time or day allotted for this universal judgment has never been revealed to any creature, and consequently is known to God alone. However, the Sacred Scripture assures us, that it shall be preceded by several dreadful preliminaries, such as plagues, wars, famines, earthquakes, strange signs in the sun, in the moon, in the stars, in the elements and seasons, and by a most cruel persecution, which shall be raised by the wicked Antichrist during his tyrannical reign of three years and a half. But all these signs, though sufficient to strike terror into any heart that will but consider them, will be only faint shadows of what is to ensue on that woeful and bitter day, when the cup of God's wrath shall be poured out on the earth, and the Sovereign Judge shall make His appearance in the clouds of Heaven, with great power and majesty, armed with the flaming sword of justice.

My design at present is to give you some faint idea of this awful mystery, by laying before you in plain and intelligible language, its principal circumstances, drawn from the Sacred Scriptures, and the writings of the ancient Fathers. In order to animate the just to perseverance, and to alarm sinners into a speedy repentance, I will endeavor to show you that

the day of judgment will be a day of inexpressible joy and consolation for the former, and a day of unutterable sorrow, shame and confusion for the latter. But as my efforts must be vain indeed, unless aided and supported by thee, O Divine Spirit, we most humbly beseech thee to enlighten our understandings, to give unction and energy to my words, and docility to the hearts of my hearers, that I may expatiate on this important subject to thy honor and glory, and to their edification. Intercede for us, O Blessed Mother of Jesus, that we may be favored with these graces. For this end we salute thee with the words of the archangel—*Ave Maria*.

As the world has been once destroyed by water, at the time of the general deluge, so it is to be destroyed again by fire. Previous to its destruction, the Gospel shall be preached all over the earth, and the Jews shall be converted, and enter into the pale of the Church. The charity of the generality of Christians shall grow cold, as the Scripture tells us; their faith shall grow languid, iniquity shall abound, and the Prophets Henech and Elias shall come clothed in sackcloth, to preach against the impostures of Antichrist, whose days shall be cut short, through an effect of God's mercy, in favor of the elect, lest they should be seduced and perverted. Mankind, in the interim, shall be under the greatest apprehensions and consternation, and as the Gospel expresses it, *shall wither away with fear in expectation, on the approaching dissolution of the universe*. The heavens will open the first scene of this amazing tragedy; *there shall be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars*. The sun shall change its glittering beams into more than Egyptian darkness, and shall bury the world in horror and obscurity. The moon, that gilds the gloomy shades of night, shall be then covered with a bloody veil; and the stars which now delight our eyes with their glorious prospect, shall put on the frightful shapes of blazing comets, and fall from the firmament. The elements shall be dissolved, and the powers of heaven shall be moved; the earth shall shake and tremble in a dreadful manner; the air shall flame with flashes of lightning, and echo with peals of thunder; the sea shall foam with fury, and swell its raging billows above the tops of mountains; the rivers shall forsake their usual channels and natural courses; valleys shall be filled up, mountains overturned, and hills leveled with the ground. In short, all nature shall fall into strange convulsions, and seem ready to start from its frame, and a raging fire shall arise, to set the whole world in flames, and to reduce all the kingdoms of the earth into a dreadful chaos. Such, O deluded

worldlings, is to be the fatal catastrophe of all those transitory enjoyments, perishable riches, fleeting pleasures, empty honors and painted toys, with the love of which you are at present so blindly infatuated. Alas! all these things shall vanish and end in smoke. It is then, dear brethren, that the disciples of the cross, who are scorned, reviled, and persecuted for justice sake, shall triumph over the pride of the world. It is then that an unspotted conscience shall be counted a more valuable treasure than all the riches, all the enjoyments of this life. It is then that it shall be deemed more glorious to have led a penitential life, and to have served God in humility and retirement, than to have subdued kingdoms and empires. No distinction will be made between kings and subjects, masters and servants, rich and poor, great and small, but what shall be grounded upon the merits or demerits of their past lives. Cæsars, Pompeys, Alexanders, and all the celebrated heroes of antiquity, who have formerly waded through streams of blood to crowns and sceptres, shall be treated then with no more respect than the meanest of their slaves. No excuse will be admitted, no apology received, no entreaties regarded. They must appear indiscriminately before the bar of divine justice, as soon as the last trumpet shall sound these words in the four corners of the earth: "*Arise ye dead: come to judgment.*" If a loud clap of thunder now affright us, cries out the devout Ephraim, how shall we then be able to withstand the sound of the last trumpet, louder than any thunder? The great St. Jerome, that prodigy of mortification, who spent several years in the desert in bitter tears and penitential rigors, assures us, that he could neither eat nor drink without imagining that he heard this trumpet sounding constantly in his ears, and summoning the dead to rise. Then *in a moment*, and *in the twinkling of an eye*, as St. Paul speaks, all the children of Adam shall come to life again, and rise out of the bowels of the earth in the very same body and with the same soul which they had before. The land and sea will in an instant throw up the carcasses which they contain, and heaven, purgatory and hell, will restore the souls which they possess, in order to be reunited to their respective bodies, and never more to be separated for all eternity. O with what transports of joy will the souls of the just meet and embrace their glorious bodies! On the contrary, with what reluctance, horror and aversion, shall the souls of the reprobate be forced to re-enter their hideous carcasses! The bodies of the former, which in this life have been mortified with fasts and self-denials, and made instrumental to works of charity and piety, shall then be endowed

with all the beautiful qualities and advantages of a spiritualized substance ; whilst, on the contrary, the bodies of the latter, which have been pampered and indulged, surfeited, debauched and defiled with filthy and abominable crimes, shall rise up loathsome, obscure, and fit only to be the fuel of everlasting flames ; immortal indeed, but for the purpose of enduring immortal torments.

It is in the valley of Josaphat, according to the Prophet Joel, c. iii. that all nations and all the tribes of the earth are to be assembled together, in order to receive their final sentence, either eternal salvation or eternal reprobation. This place is said to be situated near the city of Jerusalem, in sight of Mount Olivet and Mount Calvary, whereon our Blessed Saviour shed His precious blood for our Redemption. St. Hilary tells us that His judgment-seat is to stand upon the very spot where His cross was formerly planted ; that the glory of His divine majesty may be made manifest in the very place where His sacred humanity suffered the greatest ignominy. *He will there demonstrate His power*, says St. Augustine, *because He there demonstrated His patience*. The very sight of Him there, says this holy Doctor, will be a greater torment to the wicked than the pains of hell. *Seeing Him*, says the wise man, *they shall be struck with a dreadful fear*. Before Him shall be carried the victorious trophy and royal standard of the Cross, according to these words of St. Matt. c. xxiv. v. 30 : *Then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven*, and that to the inexpressible comfort of the just, but to the eternal shame and confusion of the reprobate, who being there reminded of the boundless love and unparalleled charity that brought the Son of God from the throne of His glory, and made Him obedient unto death, will be ready to sink with shame at the thoughts of the bad return they made Him for all that He did and suffered for their sake. Hence St. Jerome says that the Cross will loudly reproach them on the last day with their base ingratitude, and convict them of having frustrated the designs of divine mercy, through their own obstinacy and perverseness. Their confusion will be still increased, when *they shall behold the Son of Man himself in person, coming in a cloud with much power and majesty*, encompassed with legions of angels and saints. His second coming on that day will be majestic and terrible, because as St. Augustine remarks, His first coming in the adorable mystery of incarnation, was mean and contemptible. At His first coming into the world He assumed the quality of a most merciful Redeemer, and *came not to call the just, but sinners, to repentance*. At His second

coming He will assume the quality of an inflexible Judge, and descend from the right hand of His heavenly Father, to reward the just with a never-fading crown of glory, and to banish impenitent sinners out of His sight, into hell's unquenchable flames.

At His first coming He appeared in mortal flesh, in the livery and *similitude of a servant*, as the Apostle speaks, and came to be judged, and to save the world by the effusion of His blood. At His second coming he will appear clothed with an immortal and impassible body, that will retain the marks of his five sacred wounds, and outshine the brightness of the sun. Thus shall He then come to condemn the wicked world, and to judge both the living and the dead according to their works. Sinners, of all ranks, states and conditions, will then begin, alas ! too late to lament their past follies, and bewail their unhappy fate. Being singled out as the sad victims of God's justice, and the objects of His wrath and indignation, they shall be driven with ignominy to the left hand of the Sovereign Judge ; for, as the Gospel informs us, *the Angels of the Lord shall go forth, and they shall gather out all scandals, and them that work iniquity*. The tares shall be separated from among the wheat, the chaff from among the corn, the wicked from among the just, children from their parents, friends from their kindred and intimates.

At present, the Lord makes His sun shine indiscriminately on the good and the bad ; but then the scene shall be altered, and the dreadful separation shall take place, that the virtues and merits of the just, which are now overlooked by the world, and often practiced in silence and obscurity, may be manifested and publicly rewarded. The great book of accounts will be produced, and every one will have as clear a view of all the particulars of his life, as if they were written in the beams of the sun. *The unfortunate sinner shall see all his sins ranged before him in exact order*, says St. Augustine. The abominations, which are now so industriously palliated and committed in the greatest secrecy, shall be then exposed to the eyes of the whole world. All our thoughts, words, and actions ; all our desires, and the most secret intentions of our hearts ; all the subtle insinuations of pride, and contrivances of self-love, shall be examined and weighed in the balance of the Sanctuary. The least venial sin we are guilty of shall not escape the all-discerning eyes of the Omniscient Judge ; for as the least good action, though it were but a cup of cold water given for His sake, will not go unrewarded, so in like manner, the least fault we commit, though it be an idle word,

will not be left unpunished. Jesus Christ will search Jerusalem with a lantern, as the Scripture phrase expresses it ; He will discover blemishes and imperfections even in the elect.

O what shall then become of Babylon ? cries out St. Augustine. What shall then become of a sinful soul, if so strict an inquiry is to be made in the holy city of Jerusalem ? *If the just man shall scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly, and the sinner appear ?* says St. Peter, cap. iv. v. 18. What shall become of habitual cursers, swearers, blasphemers, lechers, drunkards, detractors and extortioners ? What will become of bad Christians and wicked Catholics, who, instead of conforming their lives to the maxims of the Gospel, and keeping up to the duties of their religion, are by their immoralities a disgrace to the Church, and a scandal to their profession ? Their faith, instead of saving them, will then be the rule of their condemnation, and make them liable to a far greater punishment than pagans and infidels, who never had the light of faith to direct them, according to the words of St. Matthew, c. x., *Sodom and Gomorrha shall be more favorably treated on the day of judgment.* The very Ninivites will rise up and accuse them with having been rebels and traitors to their God, enemies of the Cross, transgressors of their baptismal vows, and murderers of Jesus Christ, whom they re-crucified by their repeated crimes. The nails that pierced His sacred hands and feet on Mount Calvary will bear witness against them, and upbraid them with their perfidiousness ; the spear that opened His side will plead strongly against them, and cry out for vengeance ; nay, the whole Court of Heaven will then espouse the cause of their injured Creator, and regard wicked and impenitent Christians with horror and aversion. Whatever side they may happen to turn their eyes, they shall see nothing that will afford them any comfort, but on the contrary, everything that will contribute to increase their anguish, and to cover them with a heavy load of shame and confusion. Beneath their feet they shall see hell gaping for them, and the earth opening to swallow them up alive. Above their heads they shall behold the wrathful countenance of an inflexible judge, and on every side whole legions of infernal furies and merciless devils, waiting only for the signal, and ready to snatch them away, and bury their souls and bodies in the dismal dungeons and fiery furnaces of hell.

The merciful arms of our crucified Redeemer will then be no longer extended, as they now are, to embrace repenting sinners ; nor will His sacred head be bowed down to give them the kiss of peace. Neither

mercy, nor even one single ray of mercy, will appear then in the Fountain of Mercy, says one of the Holy Fathers; for the inexhaustible source of God's mercy, which during this life flows incessantly upon those who have due recourse to it, shall on that day turn the whole course of its stream away from sinners. It will then be too late to think of doing penance; acts of contrition will then be of no use or service; prayers and entreaties will avail nothing; justice shall then sit on the bench, and perform its part with the utmost rigor, as mercy does at present with a boundless liberality.

No tongue is able to express the joy and consolation that will replenish the hearts of the just, who are to be placed with honor on the right hand, in order to judge the *twelve tribes of Israel*, as the Gospel speaks. The Sovereign Judge will address Himself first to them, with a sweet and amiable countenance, and invite them to the possession of His heavenly kingdom, with these words of comfort: *Venite benedicti, &c.* Come, ye blessed of my Father, &c. *The sinner*, on seeing them thus honored, *will swell with indignation*, says the royal prophet. *He will gnash his teeth with spite, and pine away with envy*, when he beholds those very persons, whom he formerly looked upon as the dregs and outcasts of the world, ranked among the children of God, and the heirs of life everlasting.

The Sacred Scripture informs us, that the children of Israel were seized with terror when they heard the loud voice of the angel who published the ten commandments on Mount Sinai, in the midst of thunder and lightning; that the brothers of the patriarch Joseph were struck speechless when he said that he was Joseph whom they sold to the Egyptians; that Ananias and Saphira were struck dead on hearing the angry voice of St. Peter; that Saul was struck blind and prostrated on the road to Damascus by the force of these words: *I am Jesus whom thou persecutest*; and we read in the Gospel, that the multitude that came to apprehend our blessed Saviour in the garden, reeled backward and fell down as if thunderstruck, at the sound of these two words which he said to them, *Ego sum—I am*. This made St. Leo cry out: If the humility of Jesus Christ was then so powerful, when he came to be judged, what will his almighty power do when he shall come to judge? How shall the reprobate be able to withstand His thundering voice, when, turning Himself towards them, with fire in His eyes, and anger in His looks, He will reproach them with their black ingratitude? He will then show them the marks of the wounds in His hands and in His

feet, which their sins had inflicted, and convict them in the face of the universe, that their perdition lies at their own door. He will convince them that He left nothing undone for their salvation ; but in return for His excessive love, that they despised and betrayed Him, persecuted Him in His members on earth, sold Him for a sordid interest, for a brutal pleasure, for a momentary satisfaction ; that they crowned His head with thorns, pierced His side with a spear, and crucified Him afresh by their horrid sins and abominations. Justice, therefore, at length taking place, the Sovereign Judge shall proceed to pronounce their definitive and irrevocable sentence. Oh ! prepare yourselves, my brethren, to hear this terrifying sentence, the very rehearsal of which is sufficient to make you tremble. Every word it contains is a thunderbolt, that will make the whole valley of Josaphat ring with lamentations, woes, and sighs : *Discedite a me : Begone from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire. Depart from me, your God, your Creator, your most bountiful Benefactor, whom you have so frequently and so grievously offended ; depart from me, your Father and your Sovereign Good, whom you have basely despised ; depart from me, your Jesus and your Redeemer, whose blood you have so often trampled upon ! Begone, ye accursed, out of my sight !* Not able to plead any excuse, or to answer the least word in their own defense, or to deny any one single point laid to their charge, the unhappy wretches must depart, and with a dreadful malediction also : *Begone from me, ye accursed !* But to what place must they go ? *Into hell-fire !* For what purpose ? To burn there in the company of the Devil and of his confederates. How long ? Alas ! for millions and millions of ages, as long as God will be God, without the least interval of repose, or the least hopes of having any abatement in their pains. They are to be deprived of the sight of God for ever and ever. They are to be excluded from the glory of Heaven for a never-ending eternity ; they are to suffer all the torments that the rigor of God's justice is able to inflict on them in proportion to the number and quality of their past sins ; they will in vain cry out to the rocks and mountains to fall upon them, and hide them from the face of their angry Judge. They will wish for death, but death shall fly away from them. A violent fire shall burn them without end ; bitter regrets shall excruciate them without intermission. They shall be eternally penetrated with flames, eternally torn with remorse, eternally gnawed by a worm that is never to die. "*Their worm shall never die,*" says St. Mark, c. ix. "*and their fire shall never be extinguished.*" O my dearest

brethren, let me conjure you, by the bowels of Jesus Christ, to reflect seriously on these terrifying truths. Let the sound of the last trumpet echo frequently in your ears. Let the memory of the last and bitter day of wrath possess your souls incessantly, and excite you to a speedy and hearty repentance for your past sins, before the gate of mercy is shut in your face. Let it inspire you with a fixed resolution to prevent the terrors of God's justice, by a virtuous life, and to prepare for a favorable judgment before the time of grace and salvation is at an end. The very thoughts of the last judgment have heretofore wrought wonderful conversions in Christianity ; numberless sinners have been thereby reclaimed from vice, and roused out of the fatal lethargy of sin ; and some of the most illustrious Saints have been excited to redouble their fervor, and work their salvation in a holy fear and trembling.

O ! that I was able to inspire you with the like happy sentiments ! O that I could animate the just to perseverance, and mollify the hearts of sinners into tears of compunction ! But this is the work of thy all-powerful grace, O sweetest Jesus. We prostrate ourselves, therefore, at the feet of Thy mercy, and most humbly implore the assistance of Thy grace. Vouchsafe to look upon this congregation with an eye of pity, and do not suffer Thy precious blood to be shed for any of us in vain. Open the eyes of those who are straying away from the path of salvation, that becoming sensible of their errors, they may sincerely renounce, and heartily detest them. Thou hast said, there is joy in heaven upon a sinner doing penance. Grant, we beseech Thee, that heaven may rejoice at our conversion, and that we may, on the last day, be of the happy number of those who are to be invited to the sacred mansions of bliss with these comfortable words : *Come, ye blessed of my Father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from all eternity, &c.* ; which is the blessing I heartily wish you all, in the name of the Father, &c. Amen.



SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

ON THE SIN OF SCANDAL.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

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| I. Different kinds of Scandal. | III. Its pernicious effects. |
| II. Its contagion. | IV. Its fatal consequences. |
| V. Concluding exhortation. | |

Beatus est, qui non fuerit scandalizatus in me.—St. Matt. c. xi. v. 6.

Blessed is he that shall not be scandalized in me.—St. Matt. c. xi. v. 6.

AFTER so many shining miracles, the Saviour of the world might justly expect that mankind would not be scandalized at His Gospel, but rather glory in embracing and following it. So many sick persons instantaneously cured of different diseases, and the dead risen to life, with a thousand other prodigies, which marked out the visible hand and virtue of a God, ought undoubtedly to have induced the whole earth, not only to respect and venerate, but also to adore and worship Jesus Christ. Yet how unspeakable are the ways of the Lord! Notwithstanding these miracles He became a subject of scandal for the world, insomuch that He declares them *blessed* who shall not be affected by it. In effect, the profane and wicked world was scandalized at His person, at His doctrine, at His sufferings, and at His death, so as to make St. Paul, when speaking of the mystery of the Cross, call it the *Scandal* of the Cross. Such was the language of the Apostle; but glory be to God, this scandal has in fine ceased. Jesus Christ has triumphed over the world, His doctrine has been everywhere received, His religion has been established upon the ruins of Paganism, and upon the destruction of the Jewish synagogue, and His Cross has been transplanted from the places of execution to the foreheads of monarchs and princes of the earth, as St. Augustine speaks. But this scandal, of which Christ was formerly the object, has been unhappily succeeded by another kind of scandal, whereof we ourselves are the authors; for though we are not scandalized at present at Jesus Christ himself, nor at His sufferings and death, yet how often do we scandalize Him in the person of our neighbor, as the Scripture says, that Saul persecuted Him in the members of His mystical body, the Church. Wherefore, instead of declaring those happy who shall not be scandalized in Him, we may, by an opposite consequence, conclude, that they are unhappy who scandalize Jesus

Christ in scandalizing their neighbor. By *Scandal* I do not mean the sin of calumny or defamation ; but I understand here, by scandal, all kind of bad example, or all sort of unedifying words and actions, which of their own nature are apt to endanger the virtue and innocence of our neighbor, or which, by reason of his peculiar weakness, do become a stumbling-block in his way, and actually prove the occasion of the spiritual ruin and consequent damnation of his soul. The design of the following discourse is to give you a just idea of this destructive vice of scandal, and to deter you from it, by showing you how infectious it is in its own nature, how pernicious in its effects, how fatal in its consequences ; in short, how offensive it is to God, how injurious to our neighbor, and how detrimental to the scandalous sinner himself. Let us previously invoke the light of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, greeting her with the words of the angel, and saying, *Ave Maria, &c.*

Christ our Lord has forewarned us, that scandal should happen unto the end of time. It is even necessary, says he in the Gospel, that scandals come : not indeed that they are absolutely necessary, but because they are in a manner unavoidable, considering the frailty and depravity of human nature, and the many incentives to vice that occur daily in the world. It is only at the end of the world, that the angels of the Lord shall go forth, and effectually remove all scandals from His kingdom for ever, as we read in ch. xiii. of *St. Matthew*. Until that period the church militant shall always have to bewail the disorderly conduct of some of her members, in spite of all her zealous endeavors to reclaim them from their evil ways. Until then there shall always be in her communion vessels of clay and ignominy, as well as vessels of gold and vessels of election. Chaff will be mixed with the wheat, and tares will be suffered to grow up with the good corn, until the harvest-time, or the day of judgment, when the dreadful separation is to take place for ever ! and, as the Scripture phrase expresses it, the Lord shall thoroughly cleanse his floor, and gather his wheat into the barn, but the straw and chaff he will burn with fire, never to be extinguished—*Matt.* iii. 12. The present time is a time of forbearance ; but then the ministers of His justice shall gather out all scandals, and them that work iniquity, and cast them into the furnace, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Of all the crying sins that are then to draw down a torrent of divine vengeance upon their criminal heads, the sin of scandal is one of the most horrid, most detestable, and most diabolical. It is so

heinous in its nature, so pernicious in its effects, and so fatal in its consequences, that neither words can sufficiently express, nor thoughts rightly comprehend its malice. Other sins are generally committed in private, and lie as it were buried in the horror of darkness, but scandal openly takes off the mask, and walks abroad at noonday to spread its infection. In other sins men usually betray some kind of fear, awe, respect and bashfulness ; they are disquieted in the commission of their crimes, and blush when they come to the knowledge of others ; but scandal tramples over all laws with contempt, and seems to stifle all the sentiments that reason, modesty, and religion inspire. It is common to all vices to level and strike at the honor and glory of God : but it is peculiar to the sin of scandal to rise up in a more barefaced and determinate manner against the Almighty. It invades His honor and most sacred rights with more effrontery and audaciousness. It ruins his most noble handy-work. It overturns His best designs, and causes His holy name to be blasphemed, as the Apostle observes, (Rom. ii. 24,) where he says : *Through you the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles.* All other crimes contribute in some measure to tarnish the splendor and beauty of the Church of God, but scandal disfigures the face of Christianity. It covers it with shame and confusion. It degrades it, and renders it contemptible in the eyes of its enemies. Is it not to the sin of scandal, and to the seduction of bad example, that we are to ascribe the general corruption of morals, which seems to be gaining ground very fast in our days, and which may be looked upon as the most dangerous war and persecution that hell ever raised against the Church ? Is it not to scandal that we are to impute the decay of piety and devotion, which, alas ! is but too visible in the present vainly boasted of enlightened age of philosophy and philanthropy ? In short, is it not to the sin of scandal that we are to attribute the deluge of iniquity which overflows society, and appears to be pervading almost all ranks and conditions ? Men corrupt, seduce, and pervert each other by bad example, bad advice, and by circulating wicked books, replete with the pernicious principles and perverse maxims of the world. They openly convey the poison of corruption by their licentious discourses, irreligious conversation, *double entendres*, equivocal expressions, indecent fashions and dissolute manners, as if they only lived together mutually to destroy and work each other's eternal ruin by their scandals. O scandal, thou horrid and detestable sin ! how offensive must thou be to the living God ? Yes, my brethren, this sin defeats at once the great end that God pro-

posed to Himself in the work of our creation, as it perverts and ruins the souls which He made to see and enjoy Him for ever in the kingdom of heaven. There is no sin, therefore, that the Holy Scripture gives us a more frightful idea of than of the sin of scandal. St. Paul compares it to an *odor of death*, which procreates mortality—2 Cor. c. ii. v. 16. It is also compared to a *pestilential vapor*, which spreads infection on every side, and to a *contagious blast*, which conveys a subtle poison into the bottom of the heart, and to a *bad leaven*, which sours and corrupts the whole mass of dough that it besprinkles ; and to an *envenomed arrow, darted by a noonday devil*, in order to cause a dreadful havoc in the world, and to carry destruction into the soul. Scandal is likewise compared to a *leprosy*, which having infected one member, soon diffuses its malignant qualities into the rest of the members, and disfigures the whole body. Such is the malignity and contagion, such is the force of bad example, as Tertullian says, that it forms souls to vice more readily than good example forms them to virtue, and plunges them faster into the flames of hell than good example qualifies them for the joys of heaven. Scandal also directly opposes the redemption of our Lord Jesus Christ, as it destroys and damns what He came to seek and save by His sufferings. It wrests from His hands, and tears from His very bosom those souls which He purchased with the last drop of His precious blood. It robs Him of what was dearer to Him than His very life. It cancels the fruits of His passion and death, and renders the effusion of His sacred blood unprofitable. In short, it annihilates the price of His adorable redemption. This makes St. Bernard say, that they who by their scandalous example, bad advice, or evil solicitations, importunities and intrigues, inveigle, decoy, and seduce others into mortal sin, are in some measure more criminal than the Jews who crucified Jesus Christ on Mount Calvary, because He was then mortal, and willing to suffer for the salvation of the world, and because they were ignorant of what they did, and did not believe Him to be the Son of God when they crucified Him. Moreover, in shedding His innocent blood, they co-operated in some respect toward the redemption of mankind ; and contributed, contrary to their intention, to the accomplishment of the merciful designs of Heaven : whereas, on the other hand, scandalous sinners, who draw innocent souls from the narrow path of virtue into the broad road of perdition, openly counteract the great work of human redemption, and frustrate the design of the divine mercy. As far as in them lies, they persecute and crucify Jesus Christ in His living mem-

bers on earth, now that He is glorious and immortal in Heaven. They destroy the efficacy of His sufferings, and render the merits of death fruitless to those whom they scandalize. What can be more outrageously impious? What can be more injurious to the redemption of our Blessed Saviour? What can be more directly opposite to the grand object of His mission, and the end of all His labors? What can be more inconsistent with the great law of charity, and the first precept of Christian morality?

According to the Holy Fathers, it is one of the most divine and most meritorious employments on earth to co-operate with Christ in the salvation of souls, and to bring about the conversion of sinners; and they who zealously apply themselves to this heavenly function are called in the Scripture, Men of God, Angels of God, Apostles, Ambassadors, and Ministers of Jesus Christ. On the contrary, it is one of the most detestable and hellish employments on earth to effect the spiritual ruin and destruction of souls, and they who co-operate therein, and who propagate vice by word or example, may be justly styled emissaries of hell, agents and deputies, instruments and coadjutors of Satan, since they second his malicious designs, and avowedly espouse his interest in preference to the honor and glory of God. Scandal is of course a diabolical vice, that makes men bear a strong resemblance to the devil; for as the devil was a murderer and destroyer of souls from the beginning, as the Gospel says, so in like manner the authors and causes of scandal are murderers and destroyers of as many souls as are perverted and lost by their means.

It is herein, according to St. Paul, that the grievousness of the sin of scandal consists. *Through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ hath died?* says the Apostle, 1 Cor. c. viii. v. 11. And on this was founded the pathetic and lively remonstrance he made to the Corinthians, when he conjured them to renounce certain customs they were attached to, and at which their brethren, less confirmed in faith, were greatly scandalized. In effect, what a horrid crime must it be to destroy and murder a soul ransomed with the blood of the Son of God, and to be the cause of its forfeiting its innocence, and its right and title to the kingdom of Heaven? If robbery, that strips men of the worldly and perishable goods of fortune, which they must abandon at the hour of death; if calumny, which blasts their reputation, and deprives them of the respect and esteem they have required; if murder, that takes away the natural life of the body, which is but of a short

duration, be deemed crimes so enormous and odious in the sight of God and in the eyes of the world, that even the civil laws have justly established rigorous punishments against them, how enormous and odious must the sin of scandal be, since by it, a soul stamped with the image of God, and redeemed with the blood of His beloved Son, is robbed of the inestimable treasures and riches of virtue, deprived of the spiritual and supernatural life of divine grace, and condemned to lose God, and His glory, for a never-ending eternity? Is it not just that they, who thus have been the cause of the damnation of others, should likewise be the eternal companions of their misery? Is it not just that as they were instrumental to their perdition, and dug a pit for them to fall into it, as the royal prophet speaks (Ps. xlix.), they should also become partakers of their punishment for ever in hell? Hence, it is that the Gospel thunders out so many dreadful woes against the man or woman by whom scandal cometh, and declares that it were better for them that a millstone were hanged about their necks, and that they were drowned in the depth of the sea—Matt. xviii.

It is the duty of every Christian to be zealous for the honor of God, and to contribute, according to his ability, to the welfare and happiness of his neighbor. Our conversation and behavior in every incident of life ought to be a constant lesson of virtue to all around us, for as the Scripture says, *God has given to each of us a charge of our neighbor*, and this charge is executed by pursuing a line of conduct which may be a continual edification to him, and by giving him an example of those virtues which may attract him into the paths of truth and justice, and bring eternal salvation to his soul. Blessed and happy are they who make the light of their good example shine thus before men, and who instruct many to justice. They shall shine like stars before the throne of God for perpetual eternities, as the prophet Daniel says, and they shall receive an additional degree of glory in Heaven, in proportion to the good that will be done on earth through their means, and the greater number of souls that will be converted and gained over to the Lord by their salutary advice, good counsel, and edifying example. On the contrary, unhappy are they who tempt, encourage, corrupt, seduce and incite others to vice by their scandalous example, or impious conversation. They must be accountable to the divine justice on the last day, not only for their own personal sins, but also for all the crimes of others to which they are accessory. Nay, every sin that will be committed through their means, and every sinner that will be damned through their fault,

will bring an additional curse on their criminal heads, and subject them to a more rigorous punishment hereafter. But if scandal, barely considered in itself, be so pernicious, so destructive, and so fatal a crime, what must it be when it is given by those who hold an exalted rank in human society, and who by their office, state, and profession, are particularly bound to give good example, and to edify others under their care, such as the pastors of the church with regard to their respective flocks; ecclesiastics with regard to the faithful in general; Christians and Catholics with regard to their separated brethren of a different persuasion; superiors with regard to their subjects; masters and mistresses with regard to their servants, domestics, and apprentices; fathers and mothers with regard to their children? For, if the Gospel pronounces a dreadful woe on that man or woman by whom scandal cometh (Matt. c. xviii.), surely a double woe, a double malediction, and a double punishment must be reserved for those who, by God's appointment, are under a special obligation bound to contribute to the edification and salvation of others, when they are the very first to scandalize them; because, as St. John Chrysostom remarks, the sin of scandal is then more contagious: it makes a deeper impression on the soul it affects; it is more difficult for one to defend himself against it, and impiety draws thence a greater advantage. How criminal, then, must those nominal and half Christians be, who, by the pagan lives they lead, disgrace the Christian name, dishonor the sacred character they bear, bring unjust aspersions on the faith they profess, and hinder the conversion of numbers of well disposed souls, by the scandalous example they constantly give both at home and abroad? How criminal must those wicked Catholics be, who, by their immoralities and licentiousness, hurt the cause of religion very materially, and draw bitter reproaches on the Church, whereof they are refractory members? How criminal must those fathers and mothers, masters and mistresses, and heads of families be, whose words and actions from morning till night are continual lessons of impiety, of religion, of drunkenness, of blasphemy, of execrations and other horrid vices, for their unfortunate children and domestics? How criminal, in fine, must those scoffers, mockers, and jibbers be, who seem to glory and take a singular pleasure in running down fasts and abstinences, in turning devotion into ridicule, in laughing at those who are addicted to it, and making a jest of practices of piety and religion, as if they envied the spiritual good of others, and wished to give them a dislike of the service of God, and alienate their minds from the observance of the common duties

of Christianity? Did such people but seriously reflect what mischief they do, what scandal they give, what a dreadful havoc of souls they cause, and what numbers they have perhaps been the means of already plunging into the flames of hell, it would be almost enough to cast them into despair. Alas! every soul that is lost by their means, and through their fault, will rise up in judgment against them on the last day, and cry out to Heaven for vengeance, with a louder voice than the blood of Abel formerly cried out to Heaven for vengeance against Cain, the murderer. The Almighty himself solemnly declares, through the mouth of the Prophet Ezekiel (c. iii.), that he will then demand satisfaction from the authors of their ruin, and require their blood at the hands of their spiritual murderers. *I will require his blood at thy hand*, says the sacred text.

And really, fathers and mothers, and heads of families, who instead of being guardians and protectors of the innocence and virtue of their children and domestics, do away their good natural dispositions, and transmit their own vices to them, by the force of bad example, are in some respect more criminal than those barbarians who are said to have sacrificed their infants to their idols, or than Herod, who massacred the holy innocents; it being less cruel to plunge a dagger into a child's heart, and to deprive him of a mortal life, which otherwise would shortly have an end, than to deprive him of a spiritual life of sanctifying grace, and entail eternal ruin and damnation on both his soul and body. For this reason, St. Thomas of Villanova says, that of the two evils, he would rather choose to be responsible to God, on the last day, for the murder of a hundred bodies, than for the spiritual murder and damnation of one single soul. It is your indispensable duty, O parents, and heads of families in particular, to give your children no other example but what they may safely follow without offending the Lord, their God. You should not suffer them to be witnesses to anything but what may contribute to inspire them with an aversion to sin, and a love of virtue. You should be cautious, even to a nicety, what you either say or do in their presence, since the example that is set before them in their youth carries much weight with it, and has the greatest influence imaginable upon their pliable minds. When, from their early days, they observe nothing in the conduct of their parents but what is virtuous, they are gradually formed to the same good habits, and the virtues of their parents become for them the seed of everlasting happiness: but if the lives of their parents be vicious and disorderly, debauched and irreligious,

their spirit of irreligion and impiety will not rest with themselves, but will descend, like an inheritance to their children, who are naturally inclined to imitate their parents, as they have their example constantly before their eyes. How can it be expected that they will lead a spotless and untainted life in the midst of corruption, in the midst of debauchery, in the midst of drunkenness, of quarreling, fighting, cursing, swearing, and blaspheming? It is a well known truth that vice is catching, and that evil communication is apt to corrupt even good manners, as the Apostle observes: The best education, the most virtuous dispositions, the strongest resolutions, are hardly sufficient to hold out against it. Such is the force and seduction of bad example, bad company, bad connections, that the infection is readily taken, the poison is insensibly imbibed, and the very principles of religion are easily stifled in the tender breasts of unthinking and unguarded children, especially when their parents authorize vice and discourage virtue by their words and actions, and lead such disorderly lives, that their houses may be said to resemble so many schools of the devil. Woe and double woe to such unhappy parents and heads of families, who scandalize their children and domestics in this manner, and diffuse the contagion of their vices from generation to generation! Woe, in fine, to every man or woman by whom scandal doth come: *It were better for him that a millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be drowned in the depth of the sea, than to scandalize one of these little ones that believe in me*, says Christ, in ch. xviii. of St. Matthew, v. 6.

It is the general opinion of divines, that a word or action, which of its own nature is only a venial sin, becomes a grievous mortal sin when it occasions great scandal, and that it is the more grievous as the number of the persons scandalized is greater; yet how few sinners acknowledge themselves guilty of this crime? They seldom think of accusing themselves of it, even at the sacred tribunal of penance, although it can never be pardoned without a true repentance, and without repairing the mischief thereby occasioned; for, as they who have unjustly invaded their neighbor's property, or blackened his character by calumny or detraction, are indispensably bound to repair, to the extent of their power, the injury they have done, if they ever expect pardon from God; so, in like manner, the authors and causes of scandal are indispensably obliged to repair, to the best of their power, the scandal they have occasioned; they are to remove the occasion of scandal, and make the best satisfaction they are able for the injury they have done to the cause of virtue.

They are to put up their fervent prayers and supplications for the conversion of those whom they have unhappily caused to make a shipwreck of their innocence, and to edify them by the example of such virtues as may invite them to return to the paths of justice. But how shall they be able to discharge this obligation, if the souls which they have scandalized and led astray be already departed out of this world in their sins, and doomed to endless misery? In this case, it is evident, that a perfect reparation of the scandal is impossible, since all the penitential rigors they can practice, and all the tears they are able to shed, would not be sufficient to extinguish the flames of fire, or mitigate the torments that these unhappy souls are to endure for ever in hell. This is another aggravation of the sin of scandal. King David was so sensible of this that he did public penance all the days of his life for the public scandal he had given to his people. As he knew that the knowledge of his crimes was to reach to the latest posterity, he was willing that all future ages should be convinced of the reparation he made for the scandal he had given; he therefore did not cease beseeching the Lord to cleanse his soul from his hidden sins, and from the sins of others, to which he had been accessory in any shape whatever. Where are such public penitents to be seen now-a-days, though the world abounds with public scandalous sinners? May I not then conclude with Jesus Christ in the Gospel, and say, *Woe to the world for its scandals*, since though nothing is more common than scandal, nothing is more rare than the reparation of it, and still no obligation is more indispensable?

Let us, therefore, my brethren, beware of giving scandal to others, and at the same time let us guard against being scandalized by them. Let us make the purity of our faith shine by the purity of our morals, and prove by our exemplary lives, that true piety has not entirely forsaken the earth. Let us testify, by our edifying conduct, that there are still good Christians and Catholics to be found, who respect and honor religion, and who are not to be shaken in their principles, nor drawn from the paths of virtue by the deplorable scandals which of late years have overspread a considerable portion of the Christian world.

O Divine Jesus, sanctify Thy church, which Thou hast purchased with Thy precious blood! Remove from her all scandals, schisms and abuses! Open the eyes of those who are straying away from the road of salvation! Enlighten them with the bright rays of Thy divine grace, that they may see, renounce, and detest their errors! Inspire us all with a

proper sense of our duty ; and grant that we may faithfully comply with it, to Thy greater honor and glory, to the edification of our neighbor, and to the eternal salvation of our own souls ; which is the happiness I wish you all. *Amen.*

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

ON THE VIRTUE OF HUMILITY.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

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| I. Knowledge of oneself. | III. Reasons for humility. |
| II. Two kinds of humility. | IV. Scriptural and Patristic proofs. |

Tu quis es?—*St. John, c. i. v. 19.*

They said to him, Who art thou?—*St. John, c. i. v. 19.*

THE Gospel of this day represents St. John the Baptist baptizing on the borders of the river Jordan, and edifying all Judea by the sanctity of his life, the splendor of his doctrine, and the lustre of his shining virtues. The Jews were so much astonished at his unparalleled austerities, and conceived so high an esteem and veneration for him, that they concluded he was the promised Messiah. Hence the Sanhedrim, or Grand Council of Jerusalem, deputed a solemn embassy to him, to know from his own mouth if he really was the Messiah foretold by the Prophets, and impatiently longed for by their whole nation. The question which the Priests and Levites deputed on this occasion put to him, was, *Tu quis es? Who art thou?* This is a question which we should frequently put to ourselves in order to acquire a true knowledge of what we really are ; for as the ignorance of ourselves is the source of pride and vanity, so a true knowledge of ourselves is a powerful counterpoise that balances the soul, and brings her down to a just pitch of Christian humility. The very pagans themselves looked upon the knowledge of one's own self as the fundamental principle of true philosophy, and regarded these two words, *nosce teipsum, Know thyself*, as a lesson sent down from Heaven ; for which reason they had it inscribed in golden letters on the gates of the temple of Apollo. They were of opinion that no study was more noble or more worthy of man than man himself ; and that the first use he should make of his reason, was to attain a perfect knowledge of his own nature. Without this knowledge of ourselves every other

science is but a vain curiosity, that fills men with presumption and self-conceit, and banishes the Holy Ghost with His gifts out of their souls. However, this knowledge of ourselves must be improved and perfected by a knowledge of God, and an attentive contemplation of His infinite perfections, that we may thereby be penetrated with a more feeling sense of our own emptiness, and excited to a more grateful acknowledgment of His mercy and goodness; for the more we contemplate the grandeur and perfection of God's Infinite Majesty, the more shall we sink and drown ourselves in the abyss of our own nothingness, and be convinced that all honor and glory belong to God alone. It was a perfect knowledge of himself that made St. John the Baptist so little and so despicable in his own eyes. His virtue was put to the test by the question proposed to him by the Jewish Priest and Levites. He might have easily taken an advantage of their mistaken notion, and by one single word induced the whole Synagogue to embrace him with open arms. But his humility would not suffer him to pretend to any merit, or aspire to any dignity that was not due to him. The low and contemptible opinion he had of his own insufficiency made him forget all his high prerogatives, and appear in his own eyes a mere empty nothing, not even worthy to untie the latchet of Christ's shoes, or to render him the least or the lowest service. *I am*, said he, *but the voice of one crying in the desert*. I am no more than an empty sound in the air, that vanishes away like smoke. I am next to nothing, or but one degree from it. Behold here, my brethren, a perfect model of humility for you to copy after, if you aspire to a happy union with your Blessed Redeemer, Jesus Christ, and wish to engage him to take possession of your souls at this holy time. It is in vain for you to expect that you will attain to this happiness without the virtue of humility, as it is only on the meek and humble that He bestows His gracious favors and blessings. The design of the following discourse, therefore, is, to excite you to the love and practice of this amiable virtue, by briefly laying before you the motives and advantages that should persuade you to be truly humble. Nothing is more just, nothing more reasonable, than that we should be profoundly humble, both in spirit and in heart. This is the subject of the first point. Nothing is more acceptable to God, or more necessary to our salvation, than that we should be profoundly humble. This is the subject of the second point. Let us humbly implore the aid of Heaven, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, greeting her as usual in the words of the angel. *Ave, &c.*

Divines distinguish two kinds of humility : the one of the spirit and understanding, the other of the heart and will. Humility of the spirit and understanding makes us know and acknowledge that of ourselves we are nothing, and that we owe all that we have to God's pure bounty. It does not consist, as is generally imagined, in placing ourselves beneath what we are in reality, but in doing ourselves the exactest and strictest justice, and in clearly seeing and knowing our own indigence and miseries. Humility of the heart and will is founded in a feeling sense, and an experimental knowledge of our own weakness. It makes us sincerely despise ourselves in our hearts, and willing to be despised by others, from a conviction that we are deserving of contempt. How few Christians will you find who are habitually in this interior disposition? How few are there who continually carry in their heart this intimate conviction of their own insufficiency and unworthiness? There is nothing in which we more frequently deceive ourselves. We all believe, with a speculative faith, that all creatures are nothing of themselves, and that all glory should be given to God alone ; but in practice we do not conform our sentiments with this belief, nor glorify God in reality. Few comprehend rightly what humility is. *Many grasp at the shadow*, says St. Jerome, *few embrace the substance of humility*. Many are humble in their words, and in their exterior conduct, but inwardly are the dupes of a subtle refined pride, which they artfully disguise and conceal under the mask of an apparent humility, and the cloak of a feigned, affected modesty. The humility of most people goes no farther than their understanding. It does not reach their heart and affection. Yet humility of the understanding will avail them little without humility of the heart and will. The devils themselves understand and know full well their own baseness, abjection, and indignity, but they want humility of heart and will. True Christian humility, says St. Bernard, resides partly in the understanding, and partly in the will. It is a virtue, says this holy Doctor, by which a man, from a true knowledge of himself, is contemptible in his own eyes. It springs from a true knowledge of our own infirmities and imperfections, and makes us undervalue the judgments of men, and disregard the empty praises and applauses of the world. There is an infused humility, which is obtained chiefly through the channel of contemplation, and devout humble prayer ; and there is an acquired humility, which is attained by repeated acts of humiliation. Infused humility enlightens the soul in all her views, and makes her clearly see and feel her own absolute indigence. One ray of this heavenly light

discovers to us our own nothingness much better than all our study and reflections on ourselves can do, as one ray of the sun enlightens the earth much better than all the stars together. St. Bernard, speaking of acquired humility, says in his 87th Epistle, that *if we do not exercise humiliations, we cannot attain to humility; for humiliation is the road to humility, and produces it, as meekness in suffering tribulations and injuries produces patience.* In effect, we shall find many pressing motives and inducements to embrace all kinds of humiliations and abjections, as due to us, if we do but take a close view of ourselves, and attentively consider, with St. Bernard, what we have been, what we are by nature, what we are become by sin, what we should be by co-operating with God's grace, and what kind of beings we are to be hereafter, when death shall reduce us to dust and ashes. Everything preaches humility to us on the one hand, and gratitude to our Creator on the other. He alone is the origin, the term, and the centre of all that is good, and consequently all honor, praise and glory are due to Him alone. We owe all to Him, and have nothing of ourselves, or of our own stock, but ignorance and weakness, misery and sin. Of our own nature we are the very abstract of frailty, and an unfathomed abyss of corruption, capable of nothing when left to ourselves, but of rushing headlong into all kind of disorders. All the good qualities that we may perhaps be supposed to have, whether of nature or grace, are the pure gifts of God, and the immediate effects of His goodness. They are talents deposited in our hands, to be improved and employed for His greater honor and glory, and with a pure intention of pleasing Him, and doing His holy will in all things. And since *much will be required of those to whom much has been given*, as the Gospel assures us, the more favors we have received from Heaven, the more we should tremble at the thoughts of the rigorous account we must give of our stewardship on the last day, and the more we should humble ourselves in the centre of our own nothingness, at the view of our own indigence and unworthiness. Among the many motives which should lead us to humility, let us but attentively consider what kind of being man is: *Man born of a woman, lives but a short time, suffers much, and has many miseries entailed on him.* This is the picture which holy Job draws of mankind; and the Apostle, for this reason, justly concludes, and says, *that if any man seems to himself to be something, whereas he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.* Alas! we are indeed nothing of ourselves. Many ages have passed over before we had even an existence, or any thing else; and we would

still remain in our primitive nothingness, had not the Almighty been pleased to extract us from nothing, and to give us a being. And though we now exist by His Almighty power, we would every moment fall into our original nothingness, were we not every moment preserved and supported by His powerful hand. The several advantages of wit, learning, beauty, courage, and the like, are the pure gifts of His liberality, without any merit or right on our part that could entitle us to any of them ; for as we had no right to existence, we had consequently no right to any thing that supposes a being. All then that we now possess is a mere gratuity, for which we are indebted to our bountiful Creator ; so that we cannot, without the greatest injustice, cast an eye of complacency on ourselves, since we have nothing of our own ; nothing but sin. This indeed, and this alone, we can call our own. Whatever we have beyond sin and nothingness, is a gift of our Maker, who, as St. Augustine speaks, crowns His own gifts when He crowns the good works that His grace enables us to perform. O, what a subject of profound humiliation is this for us ! Of ourselves we are nothing but poor, vile, miserable sinners, subject to many vices, imperfections, and unruly passions. We have sinned against Heaven and earth ; we have offended the infinite majesty of God ; we have deserved the torments of hell-fire ; we have deserved the thunderbolts of Heaven ; we have, therefore, deserved to be despised by all creatures, and to be trampled upon by merciless devils for an endless eternity !

What can be more humbling ? What pride can hold out against this reflection ? We are sure that we have offended the Lord our God, and we are not sure that we have as yet obtained the happy remission of our sins, because we are not sure that our sorrow for them has had all the qualities that are necessary to entitle us to the benefit of divine mercy, or that our penance has been proportioned to the greatness of our offenses, and sufficient to appease and disarm the justice of an offended Deity. We march incessantly toward the grave, uncertain what will be our lot in the other world. Should not this dreadful uncertainty alarm us, and make us profoundly humble ? We know that at the moment of our death an eternity of happiness, or an eternity of misery must inevitably be our fate ; and we can have no certainty in this world which of the two will certainly fall to our lot, as no one here on earth, without a special revelation, can know whether he be worthy of love or of hatred. Nay, though we were even assured that our past sins were all forgiven ; though we were assured of being at present in the state

of grace, still we can have no manner of assurance that we shall not relapse, and die in a state of reprobation. We can have no assurance that we shall persevere, unto the end of our lives, in the love and friendship of God, amidst the many dangerous occasions of sin that surround us, and the various snares of the enemy that are laid on all sides, to surprise and draw us into vice. We are not stronger than Sampson, who fell a victim to his passions, as St. Jerome remarks; we are not wiser than Solomon, who at length became an idolater; we are not more holy than King David, who by one unguarded glance of his eyes was led into murder and adultery; we are not more perfect than Peter the Apostle, who denied his Master three different times; we are not more zealous for the interests of religion than Tertullian and Origen, who in the end fell into different errors, and died separated from the communion of the Holy Catholic Church. The downfall of these great men alarmed the Saints themselves, and made them tremble for their own salvation, though their conscience reproached them with no mortal crime. St. Paul, that great vessel of election, though he had been carried up to the third heaven, and had converted many nations to the faith of Jesus Christ, still dreaded, lest whilst he preached to others, and labored for their salvation, he might be reprov'd himself, and eternally lost. St. Jerome, in a desert, where he joined to a great purity of life the most rigorous practices of penance and mortification, lived under such continual apprehensions for his salvation, that he constantly imagined he heard the last trumpet sounding these words in his ears: *Arise, ye dead—come to judgment!* How great, then, must our presumption and blindness be, if we suffer pride to reign in our hearts or in our minds, since there is no ministry so holy, no state of life so perfect, in which a Christian is not exposed to the danger of falling into sin, losing God's grace, and perishing eternally!

There can be no security here on earth, says St. Bernard, after the first angel has been lost in heaven, the first man lost in Paradise, and Judas the Apostle lost in the school of Jesus Christ. The predestination of men is a hidden mystery to us, and of which we are not to judge by our present disposition. How good soever you may be, you may still change, and alas! to change no more for all eternity. How good soever you may be, you have still reason to fear both for your inconstancy in the practice of virtue, and for your future obstinacy in sin. Far, then, from despising other sinners, or judging such a man, for example, to be wicked, and yourself to be virtuous, you are to entertain

a quite different opinion, and think that this man, whom you proudly despise, may perhaps be of the number of the elect, and you of the number of the reprobate. It may happen that he falls into sin this day, to rise from them to-morrow ; and you may happen to fall to-morrow never to rise any more. God, perhaps, has destined him to be a model of penance, and you to be an example of terror to all presumptuous souls.

After all these considerations, my brethren, how deplorable must our insensibility be, if we entertain any sentiments of pride or vain-glory, or haughtily prefer ourselves in word or in thought, even to the greatest sinner on earth ? You have now heard the reasons for asserting, that nothing is more reasonable or more just than that we should be profoundly humble. It remains yet to prove, that nothing is more pleasing to God, or more necessary to our salvation, than that we should be humble. It is what I promised to show you in my second point.

Do but open the sacred volumes, and you will be convinced of the malice and pernicious effects of pride, and of the benefits and salutary effects of humility. You will acknowledge that nothing is more pleasing to God, or more essential to the character of a Christian, than humility. By it Christianity begun ; by it it has been established ; and on it it is founded. Humility is the first example that our Blessed Saviour has given us, the first lesson He has taught us, the favorite virtue of His whole life, the most constant maxim of His law ; nay, the whole substance of His doctrine, and of all the morality of the Gospel. His whole life, says St. Augustine, was a chain of virtues, and one continued series of good works ; but, from the time of His nativity in the stable of Bethlehem, unto the hour of His death on Mount Calvary, He proposed humility in a special manner for our imitation : He took human flesh for our sake, in the womb of an humble virgin ; He passed His whole life under all the disadvantages and humiliations of poverty and indigence ; and, in the end, He humbled Himself unto death, even unto the ignominious death of the cross. This made the devout St. Bernard say, O humility, humility ! how precious, how amiable, and how dear shouldst thou be to us after such an example, since the eternal Son of the living God was pleased to be incarnated with thee, and to expire in thy arms on a cross !

Nothing gains so much on the Almighty God, or renders us more acceptable in His sight. It was humility that rendered the Blessed Virgin Mary so acceptable in the sight of the most Holy Trinity, and

raised her to the eminent dignity of the Mother of Jesus Christ ; nay, St. Bernard says, that her virginal chastity would have availed her but little without humility, chastity and charity being commonly the price and recompense of profound humility. Hence it is that she attributes to her humility alone all the signal favors and blessings that were bestowed upon her, perferably to all other creatures, as appears from her own canticle of praise and thanksgiving, wherein she expressly says, *Because the Lord has regarded the humility of His handmaid, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.* It was this virtue that crowned all the other virtues of St. John the Baptist, and rendered him so great a favorite of Heaven. All the high prerogatives by which he was distinguished sprung from his humility. In it all the perfections and graces he was endowed with were founded. His soul being truly humble, he was in his own eyes a mere nothing. Wherefore, by humbling himself so low, he deserved to be exalted so high, that Christ Himself vouchsafed to preach his panegyric, and to honor him with the most noble character that was ever given to any man, having declared in the Gospel, that *among the born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist*—St. Matt. xi. 11. So true it is that *he who humbles himself shall be exalted*, as on the contrary, *he that exalts himself shall be humbled.*

Without humility the other means of salvation become useless and unprofitable. It is from it that prayer, which is the ordinary means to obtain God's grace, derives its virtue and efficacy. Penance, which is the last resource of the sinner, can have no force unless his heart be humbled and touched with a profound sentiment of his own unworthiness, and the idea of the Sovereign Majesty of an offended Deity. But if you are profoundly humble, if you are a sincere humble penitent, and earnestly sue for grace and mercy, though your sins were as numerous as grains of sand in the sea, they will be all forgiven ; for God can refuse no favor, when true humility petitions for it. He retires from the proud, and stoops to the humble, as St. Augustine speaks. He resists the one, and gives His grace in abundance to the other. We have a remarkable instance hereof in the proud Pharisee and the humble Publican, mentioned in the Gospel. The presuming saint was despised and rejected, with all the glittering show of his apparent virtues and good works, whilst the humble sinner became acceptable, and was embraced with all his vices. Why so ? Because, as St. John Chrysostom observes, the virtues of the one were accompanied with

pride, and the vices of the other attended with humility. Such, my brethren, is the wonderful force and efficacy of humility, that in one moment it can make a reprobate a saint, as, on the contrary, pride can in one moment make a just man a reprobate. How odious, then, must pride be in the sight of God, and how amiable, how necessary, must humility be? Without it no virtue can be acceptable. Without it the whole fabric of a spiritual life must inevitably fall to the ground, for it is the basis and foundation of every virtue, and the corner stone of the spiritual edifice. He that does not build upon it builds upon sand, and whatever may appear to be virtue is no more than a shadow, than a chimera, than a phantom, than a false and imaginary virtue, unless it be preceded, accompanied, and followed by humility; for the grace of God, from whence every true virtue proceeds, is only given to the humble, and does not descend into a proud soul. St. Cyprian calls humility, therefore, the root of all virtues, and the gate of Religion. St. Jerome calls it the first virtue of a Christian; and St. John Chrysostom says it is impossible to rise to the higher degrees of perfection without passing first through the lower, which consists in humility. This made the learned and pious Cassian say, that a Christian's progress in humility is the measure of his progress in every other virtue; that is, as much as he advances in humility, so much does he advance in real virtue and perfection, and no further. St. Augustine, for the same reason, compares Christian perfection to a grand and stately edifice, which rises high in proportion as the foundation is laid low; so that virtue always increases in proportion to our humility. The same holy Doctor goes farther in his 56th epistle, where he proposes and answers the following questions: What is the first thing in all religion?—Humility. What is the second?—Humility. What is the third?—Humility. There is no other road to the kingdom of Heaven; for as the sin of pride is the road to hell, the contrary virtue of humility must necessarily be the road to heaven. Pride was the first cause of our ruin, and the general source of all our disorders; therefore, by a wise disposition of Providence, humility became a necessary means of salvation, and an effectual antidote for curing our maladies. It was by pride the first fallen angel lost the glory of heaven; and the first man forfeited his original innocence and sanctity, by vainly desiring to raise and exalt himself so as to be like unto God, or to equal Him in point of the knowledge of good and evil. Wherefore, if we wish to arrive one day in the kingdom of Heaven, we must necessarily take a road quite different from that by

which the apostate angels and our first parents have been led astray. We must, in a word, renounce and shun pride, and embrace the opposite virtue of humility. This is the first and principal means which the Redeemer of the World chose for recalling lost mankind to a sense of their duty ; this is the sovereign remedy which He wisely prescribed for healing our spiritual disorders. The indispensable necessity of practicing it is founded on the very spirit and profession of Christianity, as it is by it we begin to be Christians, and to partake of the fruits of our redemption. In vain do we pretend to be disciples of Jesus Christ, unless we learn from Him to be meek and humble of heart : in vain do we expect to be of the number of His elect, and to inherit His heavenly kingdom, unless we bear some resemblance of Him, since, as the apostle teaches us (Rom. viii. 29), those who are predestinated to be of the number of God's elect must be made conformable to the image of His Son. This plainly shows that without humility we cannot hope to be saved and exalted to the kingdom of Heaven. Hence it is, that when a dispute arose among the disciples which of them was the greatest, Christ our Lord, to correct their pride, and to convince them of the indispensable necessity of humility, called a little child to Him, as we read in ch. xviii. of St. Matthew, and placing it in the midst of them, he solemnly declared and said : *Amen, I say to you, unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven.* Here he excepts no state, rank, or condition, but requires us all to bear a resemblance of little children, in order to be qualified for admittance into heaven. And that this is a resemblance in point of humility, appears clearly from the following words, which He immediately adds : *Whoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of Heaven.* Should we not therefore conclude, my brethren, that nothing is more reasonable, nothing more just, nothing more necessary, than that we should be profoundly humble, both in spirit and heart—both our duty and our interest require it. Let us then neglect no opportunity of practicing this amiable virtue. Let us frequently and earnestly beg it of God, the giver of all good gifts, crying out to Him in the words of the humble Augustine, *O Lord, teach me to know Thee, and to know myself : To know Thee, that I may love and glorify Thee alone in all things, and to know myself, that I may never secretly confide in, or ascribe anything to myself, or to my own merit.* O Divine Redeemer, thou perfect mirror of humility ! grant we may learn from Thee to be meek and humble of

heart, and that, after humbling ourselves here on earth, we may be one day exalted to the sacred mansions of bliss, which Thou hast prepared for those who are truly humble ; and which I sincerely wish you all, in the name, &c. *Amen.*

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

ON PREPARING THE WAY OF THE LORD.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

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| I. Introduction. | III. The three-fold birth of Christ. |
| II. The four advents of Christ. | IV. Hatred of sin. |
| V. Penance. | |

Parate viam Domini, rectas facite semitas ejus.—Luc. c. iii. v. 4.

Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.—Luke, c. iii. v. 4.

THE Holy Catholic Church, ever solicitous for the eternal salvation of her children, endeavors through the whole time of Advent, to prepare them for a worthy reception of their Divine Redeemer, on the happy day of His nativity. It was for this end that the holy time of Advent was originally instituted, and fasted in former ages, like the forty days of Lent, which custom is still observed by some religious orders. On the first Sunday of Advent, the terrors of the last and general judgment are laid before us in the Gospel, that the fear of God's severe justice may rouse and frighten those sinners to a speedy repentance, who are not to be drawn to a proper sense of their duty by the sweet attractive of divine love. On the second, third, and fourth Sundays of Advent, the Gospel reminds us of the sufferings, the penitential austerities, and preachings of St. John the Baptist, and represents that glorious forerunner of the world's Redeemer coming forth from the desert, holding up to our view a perfect mirror of the most profound humility, and zealously preaching on the borders of the river Jordan, the Baptism of Penance for the remission of sins. The important lesson which he here announced to the Jews of his days, cannot be inculcated too frequently. It regards the Christians of our days no less than it regarded the ancient Jews, and is equally addressed to men of every age and nation ; for as the Son of God descended from the heavens for the salvation of all men, it is the indispensable duty of all to prepare

and dispose themselves for receiving Him worthily, that they may reap the signal advantages and fruits of His advent, or coming into the world. Lest we should forget so essential a duty, the same pathetic exhortation, the same sacred voice which echoed formerly on the banks of the Jordan, and in the deserts of Jericho, is repeatedly sounded in our ears, and proclaimed from the altars and pulpits during this holy time. *Prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make straight His paths.*

The Scripture distinguishes four different advents, or comings of Jesus Christ, two of which are visible, and two invisible. His first coming was, when He manifested Himself in human flesh, and came to redeem the world. His second coming will be, when He shall descend from heaven on the last day with great power and majesty, to judge the world. The third coming is, when He comes to visit the soul of a just man, and to inhabit it by His Holy Spirit and sanctifying grace. It is of this coming He speaks in ch. xiv. of St. John, v. 23, where He says: *We will come to Him, and will make our abode with Him.* His fourth coming happens at the hour of death, when He comes to take to Himself the souls of those who depart this life in the happy state of grace, and to invite them to partake of the joys of the kingdom of Heaven. Of this coming St. John speaks in ch. xxii, of the Apocalypse, where he cries out with fervor, and says: *Come, Lord Jesus, and receive me.* It is also of this coming that the words of the Church are to be understood, when in the recommendation of a departing soul she prays, that *Christ Jesus may come forth to meet the dying Christian with a mild and cheerful countenance.*

These four comings of Jesus Christ are represented by the four Sundays of Advent; and it should be the object of our ardent desires, and devout prayers, during this holy time, that these four comings may be accomplished in our favor by the divine mercy, particularly His spiritual coming into our hearts and souls, by His Holy Spirit and sanctifying grace; because it is hereby that the redemption and deliverance of our souls from the slavery of sin is fully completed, and the happy reign of divine charity is perfectly established in our hearts. This is a matter of the utmost importance and necessity; for unless Christ comes to visit us in this manner by His Holy Spirit, and to be, as it were, spiritually born in our hearts by His sanctifying grace, it is vain that He was corporally born for us; and if we frustrated the designs of His mercy at His first coming in the mystery of the Incarnation, we may expect that He will come, at the hour of death, and at the end of the world, not to

reward and crown us, but to condemn and punish us for all eternity. To induce you, then, my brethren, to prepare your hearts for His spiritual birth, and to dispose your souls for partaking of the inestimable blessings of the approaching solemnity of Christmas, is the design of the following discourse ; wherein I will show you in what the preparation and dispositions required on your part chiefly consist. In short, I will endeavor to point out the best manner in which you ought to *prepare the way of the Lord, and make straight His paths*. Let us first, &c. *Ave Maria*.

The Gospel informs us, that when the time appointed by thy divine providence for the redemption of mankind was drawing nigh, the great herald of Heaven, St. John the Baptist, appeared in the deserts of Judea, like a morning star, to usher in the Sun of Justice, and the Light of the World. He lived there from his childhood, near thirty years, an innocent martyr, and spotless victim of the most austere penance, sequestered from the world, conversing only with God and the angels, having no other house to shelter him from the inclemency of the weather but a dreary wilderness, nor any other bed to lie on but the bare ground. A few dried locusts, and a little wild honey was the only nourishment he allowed his mortified body, and his garments were no other than rough camel's hair, or a covering of the species of coarse camlet. Thus clothed with the weeds of penance, and bearing its marks on his body, he at length came forth from his beloved retreat, to enter upon the sacred functions of the high commission on which God had sent him. Unwilling, however, to mix with a depraved world, or entirely to quit his penitential solitude, he began his mission on the confines of his desert, near the banks of the Jordan, preaching with incomparable zeal the baptism of penance for the remission of sins, and crying out with a loud voice, "*O people of Israel, do penance, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight His paths*. Now the ax is laid to the root of the trees ; therefore, every tree that yields not good fruit shall be cut down, and cast into the fire. Every valley shall be filled ; every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight ; rough ways shall be made plain, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

Thus it was that the Baptist prepared the Jews for the coming of the Messiah. Thus he disposed the world to receive its God and Redeemer, in the wonderful mystery of the Incarnation. He was sensible that he could not prepare mankind better, for partaking of the grace of their

redemption, than by persuading sinners to renounce their evil ways, and do penance for their sins. He, therefore, announced to them, both by word and example, the necessity of a sincere repentance, and he had the pleasure to see his labors crowned with wonderful success ; for whole shoals of proselytes flocked to him, from all Judea and the neighboring countries, *repenting and confessing their sins*, as the Gospel tells us, in order to qualify themselves, by this means, for sharing in the inestimable graces and blessings which the Saviour of the world brought down with Him from heaven.

Hence it appears, my brethren, that the first preparation we are to make at this time, for the reception of Jesus Christ, is to purify our souls by the holy exercise of penance. The indispensable necessity hereof is evident from the words of the Gospel, which expressly calls penance the *Baptism of Penance*, to give us thereby to understand that as baptism is necessary for the remission of original sin, so penance, or repentance, is necessary for the remission of those actual sins by which the grace of God is forfeited after baptism. Nay, the sins which Christians commit after their baptism, imply so much ingratitude, and so barefaced a contempt of the divine goodness, that, as the Council of Trent observes, the grace of baptism, unhappily forfeited by mortal sin, is not to be recovered without much labor, and many penitential tears. It is for this reason that the holy Fathers call penance a *laborious Baptism*, and the second plank after spiritual shipwreck.

Christ himself has declared the necessity of penance in terms so clear as to preclude every possibility of a doubt, saying : *Unless you do penance, ye shall all perish* ; and St. Luke plainly indicates its wonderful power and efficacy, when he styles it *the Baptism of Penance*. When it is true and sincere, it effaces and does away all kind of sins, let them be ever so grievous, ever so numerous. It levels the highest mountains of human pride. It fills up every valley ; that is, it repairs every loss, every void that sin occasions in the soul. It rectifies what was wrong, makes straight what was crooked, and smooths what seemed before rough and difficult to corrupt nature. It removes every obstacle, renders the yoke of Christ sweet and light, and makes a true gospel penitent experience more real comfort, inward content, and solid joy, in his tears, self-denials, and other penitential exercises, than worldlings do in their feasting, diversions, and criminal pleasures, as St. Augustine remarks, when he says, *that the penitential tears of devotion are sweeter than the joys of theatres*. In short, a true and sincere repentance is

not only a necessary disposition, but likewise a most effectual means to avert the wrath, and draw down the blessings of Heaven, and to engage the Son of God to take possession of our souls by His Holy Spirit, and to be spiritually born in our hearts by His sanctifying grace, on the approaching festival of His Nativity.

To render this truth still more plain and intelligible, it is to be observed, that divines distinguish a three-fold nativity of the Son of God, and it is in honor hereof that three distinct masses are appointed by the Church to be celebrated on Christmas Day. The first is His eternal nativity, or divine generation, by which He proceeded from the Father from all eternity. The second is His temporal nativity, or human generation, by which He was conceived by the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary, in the plenitude of time. The third is His spiritual nativity, by which He is, as it were, born in a spiritual manner in the hearts and souls of the faithful, by the communication of His holy spirit, and the infusion of His sanctifying grace. The first and second nativity are entirely independent of us, but His spiritual nativity depends on our co-operation, and requires certain conditions and dispositions on our part, as it happens within us. The first condition is to cleanse the heart, and purify the soul from filth of sin, that it may become a fit abode for his reception and residence ; for it is not to be supposed that He will accept of a heart defiled with iniquity, enter into a criminal soul, or dwell in a body that is subject to sin. A clean heart is the chief object of His complacency, the most agreeable present we can offer Him, and the dwelling-place He seeks and demands of us at this holy time. It is the most powerful attractive of His gracious favors, and the surest way to enjoy His divine presence, and to engage Him to come and take a permanent possession of our souls. Hence it is, that he calls on us, in the book of Proverbs, in these affectionate terms : *My child give me thy heart* ; and again, in ch. v. of St. Matthew, he pronounces *the clean of heart blessed and happy*, because *they shall see and enjoy God*. They shall be replenished with the treasures of His grace here, and with the riches of His glory hereafter. This made the royal prophet beseech the Lord most fervently to *create in him a clean heart, and to renew a right spirit within his bowels*. This made him cry out with confidence, and say, *A contrite and humble heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise*. A heart thus disposed is a most acceptable holocaust, a most agreeable sacrifice, that reaches the throne of God, in the odor of sweetness, and is much more pleasing

in His sight than any outward victims, or exterior humiliations of the body.

If we, therefore, aspire to a happy union with Jesus Christ, and wish to prepare in ourselves a worthy mansion for Him at this holy time, we must, before all things purify our hearts and souls, and carefully wash off all the foul stains of sin with the salutary waters of penance. We must purge out the old leaven, and remove all that in us is disgusting and offensive to the all-seeing eyes of His Divine Majesty. We must subdue our passions, and renounce those daring vices which we have blindly erected, like so many idols, on the altar of our hearts. We must, as the Gospel says, *lay the ax to the root*. We must look into all the secret recesses of our conscience, and probe all the sores and wounds of our souls, until we have discovered every latent inordinate affection, and dislodged every vicious disorder that may happen to be lurking therein. If we fail in this point, all we do will be to little purpose ; for our hearts and souls cannot become the abode and temple of Him who is sanctity itself, as long as they are infected with criminal affections, enslaved by unruly passions, or defiled with one single mortal sin.

The heart which is averted from the Creator and converted to the creature by sin, must be averted from the creature and converted to the Creator by inward compunction ; for the heart alone is the seat of a true repentance, as it is the seat of love. It must be truly changed, and effectually turned from the irregular love of the world, and of its sinful pleasures, to the love of God, who is the fountain of all goodness. It must prefer Him, and value His friendship above whatever else is nearest and dearest to it on earth. It must hate and detest sin, not only because it is prejudicial to the sinner, and renders him liable to everlasting torments of hell-fire, but because it is displeasing and offensive to God's infinite goodness. Without this conversion or change of the heart there can be no true repentance, for which reason the Holy Ghost exhorts *prevaricators to return to their hearts, to be converted in their whole heart, to form to themselves a new heart and a new spirit, to rend their hearts and not their garments, to cast off the works of darkness, and to become a new creature*.

This is the very essence of a Christian life, though, alas ! but little understood, and still less attended to by the generality of modern penitents, who are so apt to be deluded and deceived in this point by outward appearances, that they imagine themselves to be very penitent,

provided they shed a few tears, vent a few sighs or moans, or run over, superficially, a few devout acts of contrition, although their hearts remain at the same time unchanged, and still attached to sin. Hence it comes, that there is often great reason to suspect the validity of their past confessions, and to look upon their repentance as imperfect and defective, either for want of that inward compunction of heart which God requires, or for want of a firm purpose of amendment, and a sincere disposition to avoid the immediate occasions of sin, and repair the injuries they have done; but the Almighty God, who sees the most secret windings of the heart, cannot be deceived or imposed on by lying vows, verbal protestations, or exterior appearances of repentance. He requires us, indeed, to produce *fruits worthy of penance*, and admonishes us, in the Scripture, to manifest our repentance by outwardly *fasting, weeping, and mourning*. But then the heart and the interior must be principally attended to; it must be penetrated with a lively sorrow for having offended God, and be firmly determined to offend Him no more.

Every true gospel penitent must, like King David, conceive a perfect hatred for sin; he must pursue it home to his inclinations, pluck it up by the root, destroy it from its very foundation, and endeavor to expiate it by satisfactory works of penance. Hence St. Ambrose says, him I call a penitent, who both day and night is grieved to the heart for having offended the Lord his God, who abhors the evil he has done, who declares war against his passions, and renounces all sinful pleasures. Him I call a penitent, who anticipates the judgment of God, by persecuting and punishing sin in himself, according to the measure of its malignity, from a conviction that the penance of a repenting sinner should bear some proportion to the number and enormity of the crimes committed. The penitents of the primitive ages of Christianity were so fully convinced hereof, that they humbly submitted to the most rigorous austerities, and to the most painful exercises of self-denial and mortification, covering their bodies with sackcloth and ashes, lying prostrate before the church gate, weeping and bewailing their sins in the bitterness of their souls, and fasting three days in the week on bread and water, for the space of three, five, seven, nay, fifteen years, successively, for the expiation of a single mortal sin. How far, alas! have the penitents of our days degenerated from their zeal and fervor! They have such an aversion to any penitential exercises which are mortifying in the least degree, that it is often with difficulty they are persuaded to

recite a few times the penitential psalms, or observe a few fast days, for the expiation of a multitude of horrid mortal sins, which cry aloud to Heaven for vengeance. Notwithstanding it is certain that the justice of the offended Deity must be satisfied, either in this life or in the next ; either by the voluntary penance of the sinner, or by the vengeance of an angry God, as St. Augustine says.

Since, therefore, my brethren, penance is the sole plank of safety which you have left, after the spiritual shipwreck of your baptismal innocence ; since it alone can emancipate you from the fetters of sin, and the bondage of Satan ; since without it you cannot expect that the Son of God will be spiritually born in your hearts, by His grace and Holy Spirit, let me entreat you to hearken to the voice of the great herald of Heaven, and precursor of Jesus Christ, inviting you at this holy time to do penance for your past offenses : *Do penance*, says he, *for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand ; prepare the way of the Lord, make straight His paths.*

O do not let this time of mercy slip away, like so many Advents which have past, without any benefit or advantage to your souls. This may probably be the last Advent that several of you will ever live to see. Perhaps some of you here present this day are standing on the brink of eternity, and upon the verge of the awful night of death, when it will be out of your power to repent, or to perform any other good work conducive to life everlasting. If you refuse to lay hold of the mercy which is now offered to you, if you slight the precious moments of your visitation, and neglect the powerful and necessary means of salvation, whilst you are in your health, and capable of having recourse to them, the day, perhaps, may shortly come, when you will wish for one hour to do penance, and not be able to find it. You may, perhaps, cry out in your last illness, for the holy sacraments of reconciliation, and be suffered to die without them, as St. Gregory of Nyssa tells us, happened to a certain Catechumen, who having postponed his baptism from time to time, was in the end justly deprived of it, in punishment of his negligence and willful delays, for he was suddenly taken ill in the midst of a lonesome forest, where he expired, crying out in vain with a loud voice to the trees and mountains to come and baptize him. So true it is, my brethren, that delays are extremely dangerous, particularly when Heaven and eternity are at stake. If any, therefore, amongst you, be conscious to yourselves that you are in the unhappy state of mortal sin, let me conjure you to repent in time, and to shake off the galling yoke

of Satan, by a speedy and sincere conversion. Let me beseech you, with apostolic words, to arise without delay, from the lethargic sleep of sin, and Jesus Christ will enlighten you with the rays of His grace. Throw yourselves at the feet of His mercy, with a penitential spirit, and in the sincerity of your hearts, and He will stretch forth His all-powerful hand to break asunder the chains of iniquity with which you are fettered, and to relieve you from the heavy burden with which you are oppressed. The night of sin is gone before, as the Apostle speaks; the day of salvation is drawing near; the feast of the nativity of Our Lord is at hand; He is coming to make us a visit, and to enrich our souls with His heavenly graces and blessings. He is already striking at the door of our hearts, and suing for a lodging therein. Can we be so ungrateful to Him, or so insensible to our eternal welfare, as to refuse Him admittance, like unto the people of Bethlehem, who found no room for Him in their houses? Can we be so perverse as to reject Him, like unto the obstinate Jews, of whom the Scripture speaks: *He came into His own, and His own received Him not!* Let us rather yield to the tender solicitations of our Divine Redeemer, and give Him our whole heart, cleansed and purified, that we may be of the thrice happy number of those of whom the Gospel says: *To as many as have received Him, He has given a power to become the children of God.* Let us copy after the ancient Patriarchs and Prophets, who longed most ardently for His coming. Let us imitate the pious shepherds of Bethlehem, and seek Him till we have the happiness to find Him. Let us, in fine, invite Him into our hearts and souls, by humble and devout prayer, and make Him a tender of our best homages, like unto the three Kings of the East. Such are the sentiments, such are the dispositions, which the Church endeavors to excite in her children at present, raising her voice for this purpose with the great St. John the Baptist, and frequently exhorting us all to *prepare the way of the Lord, and to make straight His paths*, that He may possess our hearts and souls here by His grace, and that we may possess Him in the kingdom of His glory hereafter.

Grant, O Divine Jesus, that this may be our happy case. We beseech Thee, by that inestimable charity which made Thee descend from the highest heavens for our salvation, to give us the grace of a true and sincere repentance, that we may be qualified to partake of the blessed fruits of Thy redemption, and to receive Thee worthily into the temple of our souls at the approaching festival of Thy nativity. If Thou livest thus

in us, and we live in Thee, we may hope, with humble confidence, to be replenished with Thy celestial benedictions here, and to be admitted hereafter into the kingdom of Thy eternal glory, which is the happiness that I sincerely wish you all, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

ON THE DUTIES OF CHILDREN TO THEIR PARENTS.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. Lessons from the Gospel of the day.
- II. Four-fold duty of children to their parents : Love, inward respect, obedience, and assistance, both spiritual and temporal.
- III. Scriptural inculcations.

Venit Nazareth et erat subditus illis.—Luc. c. ii. v. 51.

The child Jesus came to Nazareth, and was subject to them.—Luke, c. ii. v. 51.

THE Gospel of this day furnishes us with several instructive lessons of piety, zeal, charity, humility and obedience. In the first place, the piety and devotion of the people of God, in observing all the festivals ordained by the Mosaic Law is worthy of our imitation, and ought to confound the sloth and indolence of many Christians, who but profane the Sundays and holidays, which in the New Law are particularly consecrated to the divine worship. The Jews had but one Temple, or common place of public worship in Jerusalem, to denote the unity of God ; and they were accustomed to repair every year to that Temple from all parts of the holy land, in order to eat their paschal lamb, and to solemnize the great festival of the Passover, which was instituted in memory of, and in thanksgiving for their deliverance from the bondage of Egypt. The Blessed Virgin Mary, and her most chaste spouse St. Joseph, were too religious and exemplary to neglect submitting themselves to this pious institution. They went every year to Jerusalem at the solemn day of the Passover, and brought with them the divine infant Jesus, in order to present Him to the Lord. The first oblation they made of Him in the Temple happened on the thirty-third day after the day of His circumcision, inclusively, when the days of the Immaculate Virgin's purification were expired ; for though she stood in no need of being purified,

as she was full of grace and blessed among women, yet through a surprising effect of her profound humility, she submitted herself to the Mosaic Law, and offered for her dearly beloved Son a pair of turtles, or two young pigeons, in the Temple, this being the sacrifice that was then required from the poorer sort. The Scripture gives no farther account of the infancy of our Blessed Saviour from this time until He was twelve years old, except that He grew up and was strengthened full of wisdom, and the grace of God was in Him. When he was twelve years old, having gone to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, and having tarried there for the space of seven days, until the ceremony was over, He absconded Himself, for the glory of His Heavenly Father, from Joseph and Mary, who imagined Him to be in the company of their relations and friends, that were returning from the solemnity to their respective abodes.

But after one day's journey, having perceived their mistake, and having made a close inquiry among their acquaintances, they could get no intelligence of Him, wherefore they returned to Jerusalem without delay, full of grief and anxiety, searching for the child Jesus, whom they found the third day, to their inexpressible joy, sitting among the Doctors in the Temple, proposing and answering questions concerning the law of God, to the great astonishment of all that were present, particularly of His Blessed Mother, who said unto Him, *Son, why didst Thou so unto us? Behold, Thy father and I with grief were seeking Thee.* The love and regard He had for them made Him desist from the sacred employment wherein He was engaged, and return at their request to Nazareth, where He led a retired and humble life in a poor cottage, until He was thirty years old, unknown to all in the meanwhile, but obedient and submissive to Joseph and Mary, under whose care He advanced in wisdom, and age, and in grace, both before God and man. These are the contents of this day's Gospel, in which we are to observe that the grief which the Blessed Virgin conceived when, without any fault of her's, she lost her beloved Son, and the solicitude with which she immediately sought Him until she found Him in the Temple, teaches us, that if we have the misfortune to lose Jesus, and forfeit His grace by mortal sin, we are not to put off our conversion from day to day, but are bound to have recourse to His mercy by a speedy repentance, and to seek Him in the Temple among the ministers of the Lord, by approaching the Sacrament of Penance with a sorrowful heart, and not suffering, if possible, a moment to intervene betwixt our rise and our fall,

as delays are always dangerous, and every moment may be our last. Joseph and Mary are also a noble pattern for all parents to copy after; as, on the other hand, the conduct of the child Jesus is a model for all children, and points out to them the love, respect, obedience, and submission which they owe to their parents. It is on the duties of children to their parents that I propose to expatiate in the following discourse, after we shall have invoked the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, saying with the Angel, *Ave Maria*.

Although the pastors of our souls, and all lawful superiors, both spiritual and temporal, are comprehended under the name of *parents*, according to the Scripture style, yet our natural parents are principally understood by the words *father* and *mother*; it is to them we are indebted, next under God, for our lives and being, our support and education; for which reason the duties of children to their parents are ranked in the Scripture next after our duty to God, and placed at the head of the commandments of the second table of the Divine Law which relate to our neighbor. *Honor thy father and thy mother*, says the Lord, *that thou mayest be long lived upon the land which the Lord thy God will give thee*—Exod. c. xx. v. 12. Nature, as well as religion inculcates this obligation, and teaches us that nothing is more reasonable or more just, than that children should honor those who brought them into the world with much labor and pain, and reared them with great trouble, anxiety, and solicitude. This honor includes several particular duties, the chief of which are love and respect, submission and obedience, help and assistance.

The first duty is to love their parents, for *a child that does not love his parents*, as St. Peter Chrysologus says, *is rather a monster of nature than a child*, since nature inspires the very irrational animals themselves with the like instinct of love. The love children are to have for their parents must not be a mere natural affection, but a rational and Christian love, according to God; that is, they are to love them in God, and for God: we are commanded to love our neighbor in this manner, much more so our parents; we are to pray for their spiritual good, and beg of God to grant them a long, happy, and peaceable life, that His grace may support them in their difficulties, direct their ways, and crown their labors with eternal bliss. How unnatural then, and how inhuman must those children be who bear a hatred in their hearts to their parents, who curse them and wish them evil, who shorten their days by grief and vexation, and bring their gray hairs to the grave before their time? How

ungrateful, how perverse and barbarous are they who long to get rid of their parents, and wish for their death, in order to become their own masters and inherit what they possess? Is it not the height of impiety to rejoice at the death of those whom God was pleased to make the authors and instruments of the very life we enjoy? If the Scripture says (1 John iii. 15), that *whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer* in his heart, with how much reason may such unnatural children be called parricides? *He that curseth his father or mother dying, let him die*, says the Lord (Levit. c. xx. v. 9); and again, in c. xx. v. 20, of the book of Proverbs: *He that curses his father and mother, his lamp shall be put out in the midst of darkness, and the inheritance gotten hastily in the beginning, in the end shall be without a blessing*; for such evil wishes and monstrous behavior draw down the anger of God upon wicked children, and often provoke the Almighty, not only to prevent the temporal enjoyment they thirst after, but also to *extinguish their lamp in the midst of darkness*; that is, to cut them off the face of the earth in the midst of their sins.

The second duty of children to their parents is to bear a great respect to them, not only inwardly in their hearts, but also outwardly in their words and carriage; they are to respect them as God's vicegerents, and their superiors in wisdom, age, and authority; they are to respect not only their persons, but likewise their instructions, admonitions, and reprehensions. *My son* (says the wise man, Prov. i.), *hear the instructions of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother, that grace may be added to thy head, and a chain of gold to thy neck*. This respect must be testified by a cheerful and ready compliance with their directions; it must be both interior and exterior; it must be rendered not out of habit or custom, or a mere servile fear, but upon a principle of conscience, with an intent of honoring and respecting God in the person of our parents, who govern us in God's place. Children are to pay a great deference to their judgments, submit to their corrections, and acquiesce to their orders without contradiction; they are to receive their instructions with humility, hearken to their advice with attention, and never betray the least contempt of them by their words, looks, gestures, or actions. When their parents are advanced in years, or grown infirm, feeble, and peevish, children are to take particular care not to spurn, mock, or deride them, not to reproach them with their failings in a contemptuous manner, not to expose their ill-humors and weaknesses, nor to abandon nor disown them, because they are in poverty

and subject to some imperfections ; on the contrary, it is then that children ought to treat their parents with an extraordinary tenderness, bear their infirmities with Christian patience, and most carefully avoid what may give them any occasion of trouble or affliction. Tobias's wife had not the reputation of sanctity, nor Solomon's mother an untainted character, yet Tobias commanded his son to honor his mother all the days of her life, and Solomon never failed in his respect to Bethsheba. We read in the third book of Kings, ch., ii., that when his mother came to him, he rose from his throne, went to meet her, and placed her on a royal throne at his right hand. In like manner we read (Gen. ch. xlv.) that Joseph, though raised to the dignity of Viceroy of all Egypt, was so far from being ashamed to own his poor old father, Jacob, before the King and the whole court, that he had no sooner understood that he was coming to Egypt, but he mounted his chariot and went to meet him, and having seen him he cast himself upon his knees, and mixed his embraces with tears. His high dignity did not raise him above his duty, nor did the meanness of his father's condition lessen his respect in the least as long as he lived. At and after his decease, Joseph paid him the last tribute of filial piety in the most respectful manner ; for, as the Scripture informs us, he rushed toward his bed to embrace him when he was dying, he fell on his face with sorrow, he kissed him with the most tender affection, he wept in the bitterness of his soul, and took particular care to have his body embalmed according to the custom of the country, and to see it carried with pomp and magnificence into the land of Canaan, and interred with honor in the tomb of his ancestors. Behold here a noble lesson for children never to abandon their parents in the hour of distress, or neglect them when they stand in need of comfort and relief. Whenever they happen to do anything, even inadvertently, that displeases or offends their parents, it is their duty to be troubled hereat, to ask pardon without delay, and to be afterward more circumspect in avoiding whatever they know will contristate them. It is a mark of a child's respect to beg the blessing of his father and mother upon his bended knees. The blessing of a parent was thought so much of in the Old Testament, that it was sought for with tears, and the most fervent entreaties. Esau, though a married man, was not ashamed to be seen begging his father Isaac's blessing with streams of tears. Jacob begged and obtained his father's blessing, by which means the blessings of Heaven and earth was bestowed on him and his posterity in great abundance. Hence the Holy Ghost, says Ecclesiasticus,

ch. iii., *The father's blessing establisheth the houses (or family) of the children; but the mother's curse rooted up the foundation.* It is another mark of children's respect to ask their parents' advice, and consult with them in all difficulties and matters of importance, particularly when they deliberate about choosing a state of life. After consulting God, and imploring the light of Heaven to direct their ways, they are, according to divines, strictly bound in conscience to consult their parents, and to ask their consent and blessing, before they engage in the married state; and their parents are bound, on their parts, not to be unreasonable in refusing their concurrence and approbation; they are not to force the inclinations of their children, nor to compel them to marry against their will, or become ecclesiastics, without a vocation from God, or hinder them if they have a true vocation. The Council of Trent (Sess. xxv. ch. 18.) excommunicates those who, directly or indirectly, force others to enter a religious order, or hinder them from it when they are willing and well disposed. We read in ch. xxiv. and xxxviii. of Genesis, that the great patriarchs, Isaac and Jacob, took wives of their parents' choosing; and again in the same book we find, that Esau sinned in marrying one of the daughters of Canaan, because without any just cause he had done a thing which he knew would give much grief and affliction to his father Isaac.

As love and respect are the two first duties, so the third duty of children to their parents is *obedience*, of which St. Paul says, (Eph. vi.): *Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is just*; and again, (Coloss. iii.): *Obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord.* Obedience is a just and natural consequence of the power which God and nature have given to parents with regard to their children; their power is a power to command, which is acknowledged by obedience. The Scripture says (1 Kings, ch. xv.) that *obedience is better than sacrifice*, on which text St. Gregory writes thus: *With reason obedience is preferred to sacrifice, because by sacrifice the flesh of some animal, or some other exterior thing, is immolated, but by obedience our own will is offered and sacrificed to God.* Children are bound to obey in all things that their parents command in the Lord, or according to the Lord, that is, in all things that are not sinful, or that are consistent with the law of God; for as He is our chief or principal Father, all commands that contradict His are void and of no force: *Then alone*, says St. Augustine, Sermon, lxx. in Ps. 70, n. 2, *must children not obey their father when he commands anything against the Lord their*

God; in this case they are obliged to obey God rather than man, as St Paul speaks—Acts, ch. xxviii. v. 25. They ought, indeed, with all possible respect, to make a submissive remonstrance to their parents, and beg to be excused, declaring their readiness to obey, if they could do it without offending the Lord, or saying with the Apostles (Acts iv.) when they were forbid to do what God ordered: *Judge yourselves if it be just, to obey your orders rather than the orders of God.* Hence it follows that it was not lawful for Jonathan to obey his father Saul, when he commanded him to deliver up David to be put to death (1 Kings, xx.), nor was it lawful for Herod's daughter to obey her wicked mother Herodias, when she commanded her to petition for the head of St. John the Baptist—Mark, ch. vi. v. 24. By the same rule children are not obliged, in obedience to their parents, to sacrifice their eternal happiness to a worldly interest, or to hazard their salvation by marrying persons of a different religious persuasion, and exposing their posterity to the danger of being brought up in errors contrary to divine faith. In like manner, the obedience children owe their parents does not oblige them to keep from embracing a religious state when God calls them to it, and their parents unjustly oppose their vocation, as St. Augustine observes in his writings against Adimantus, who was so impious as to censure the Gospel for that reason, and to say that it was contrary to the law of God in that point; wherefore the holy doctor replied, that the Gospel does not forbid children to render to parents the honor and obedience that are due to them, but only forbids them to be honored or obeyed more than God; for he that says, *Honor thy father and thy mother*, says also (Matt. x. 37), *He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me.* It is in this sense that the following words of our Saviour (Luke, ch. xiv. v. 26) are to be understood: *He that hateth not his father and mother, cannot be my disciple*; for to hate them is to be deaf to them, inasmuch as they go between us and God, and are for withdrawing us from the divine service, though at the same time we are to love and honor them always as our parents; hence we read (Luke, ch. ii. v. 48, 49,) of Christ Himself, that though He was submissive and obedient to Joseph and Mary, yet when His Blessed Mother found Him in the Temple among the Doctors, and had said, *Son. why hast Thou done so to us?* He replied, *Did ye not know that I must be about my Father's business?* teaching us hereby, that those who are called to labor in the Lord's vineyard are not to be over-

ruled by flesh and blood in the discharge of their spiritual duties, and the sacred functions of their state.

Children are therefore to regard in their parents the authority of their Heavenly Father, and to put no other bonds to their obedience than what the law of God does. They ought to obey cheerfully, without grumbling or muttering. To render their obedience an act of virtue, they ought to obey, not merely through a natural inclination, or out of a servile fear of punishment, or hope of some temporal reward, but upon a Christian motive, and with a view of pleasing God, because it is just and agreeable to Him, because it is God that commands them to obey, and because in obeying their parents they obey God's orders, and in disobeying them they disobey God, who commands and speaks to them through the mouths of their parents. The example of Jesus Christ should induce them the more readily to comply with this important duty, not only in their childhood, but even when they are advanced in years. All that the Gospel tells us of His life, from the age of twelve years, when he was found in the Temple, till the age of thirty years, when he appeared in public is, that *He went down to Nazareth, and was subject and obedient* to Joseph and Mary. In obedience to His Mother's desire, He wrought His first miracle at the marriage of Cana, though otherwise His *hour was not come* (John ii. 4.), and with His dying words He recommended her to the care of His beloved disciple. O, how will His example confound undutiful children at the last day! How will it condemn them who are refractory to their parents' orders—who, by their stubbornness and disobedience, make their parents' hearts ache, and are the means of cutting their days short! St. Paul (Rom. ii. and Tim. ii. 3) ranks such children in the list of the greatest sinners, and classes their disobedience amongst the abominations of the Gentiles, which exclude from the kingdom of heaven.

The fourth duty of children is, to assist their parents in their necessities, both spiritual and temporal, as far as they are able: this is so strict an obligation, that it would be a grievous sin to apply even to pious uses, or give to the Church what is wanting for the support of parents. For this reason our Blessed Saviour blames the Jews (Matt. ch. xv.) for leaving their parents in want, under the pretext of making offerings for them, and giving gifts to the Temple. The angelical doctor, St. Thomas of Aquin, speaking of this obligation, says, that in case of extreme necessity, a son is bound to help his parents even before his own children; he also teaches, that though the obedience he owes

them does not oblige him to omit embracing a religious state, in condescension to their orders, yet their wants may oblige him thereto ; so that it is unlawful for a son who has poor parents, that cannot be supported without his assistance, to retire from the world into a monastery, and leave them to the care of Providence, because this would be tempting God, as it would be wilfully neglecting the human means whereby they might be relieved, and endangering the life of his parents upon the hopes of divine assistance. Charity and mercy are more acceptable to God in this case than sacrifice, for which reason the Lord declares (Eccl. iii. 15), *that the mercy which is shown to a poor parent shall never be forgotten*. We have a remarkable example of this filial piety in young Tobias, who by the labor of his hands, and the sweat of his brow, maintained his father, and served him with care and indefatigable love in his old age, after he had lost his sight by an accident, which God's providence permitted, in order to exercise the patience of the father, and the piety of the son. We have a far more noble example in the person of our Blessed Saviour, who, ready to expire on the cross, forgot not this filial duty, but recommended His Virginal Mother to His beloved disciple St. John, interrupting, as I may say, for a moment, that great sacrifice, in order to provide for her ; for in saying to St. John, *Behold thy mother*, He charged him to take as much care of her as if she was his real mother ; He considered her then, not as His creature to whom He had given life, but as His parent who had given Him birth ; and therefore, as He was then leaving the world, He put her, as it were, under the care of another son, recommending by his example, to all pious children, the continual care of their parents, as St. Augustine observes—Tract. cxv. in Job. Hence St. Paul (1 Tim. v. 8) says : *That if anyone has not care of his own, and especially those of his house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel ; nay, he is worse than the beasts, who, as St. Ambrose remarks, are taught by nature to perform this duty, and to feed and cherish the old ones when they are unable to provide for themselves (Hex. 1. v. ch. 16), and really if it be a grievous sin to neglect assisting and relieving strangers in their distress, how much more grievous a sin must it be to neglect succoring our parents under the pressures of want and poverty ? At our birth we are helpless, and even more miserable than any other living creature ; we cannot do the smallest thing in our infancy to serve and assist ourselves. As our parents provide, then, all necessities for our relief and preservation when we are unable to help ourselves, Divine*

Providence has ordered that in return we should assist, relieve, and comfort our parents in their old age, when they are visited with infirmity, and labor under the various inconveniences, wants, and grievances which usually attend old age. Their spiritual necessities are no less to be attended to, and every proper means is to be made use of for procuring the eternal salvation of their souls; their last will is to be faithfully fulfilled after their death, and their just and lawful debts are to be paid, as far as the effects they have left will allow; and if they unjustly detained the property of others, restitution is to be made of it by the children who inherit their worldly substance.

O children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is just. Honor thy father and thy mother, which is the first commandment with a promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest be long-lived upon earth. And you, fathers, provoke not your children to anger: but bring them up in the discipline and correction of the Lord.

The blessing of Jesus, the Father of children, be with you. *Amen.*

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

ON THE TEN COMMANDMENTS.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. Excellence of the Ten Commandments.
- II. Divisions of the Commandments.
- III. Their explanation.
- IV. Peroration.

His mother said to the waiters: Whatsoever he shall say to you, do ye.—St. John, c. ii. v. 5.

ST. AUGUSTINE calls the Ten Commandments an epitome of all the most perfect and the most excellent laws, because they command all virtue, prohibit all vice, and comprise all the natural and moral duties of man to God and to his neighbor. By them we are to be tried and judged on the last day, and either rewarded with eternal happiness, or condemned to eternal misery, even as we shall be found to have fulfilled or transgressed them in our life-time. They are a summary or abridgment of all we have to do, in order to be saved, as the Creed is an abridgment of all we are to believe, and the Lord's Prayer is an abridg-

ment of all we ask and hope for from God. At the very beginning of the world the Lord imprinted His sacred law in the soul of man, and stamped on his heart the light of reason, which gave him a sense of his duty, and taught him what he was to do and what he was to avoid. He gave him a conscience as an inward monitor, to show him the difference between right and wrong, good and evil, and to move him to practice the one and shun the other. Had man continued in the state of innocence, this knowledge of the law of Nature, engraved in the bottom of his heart, would have served as a rule and guide to conduct him to the end of his creation, eternal happiness; but the heart and mind of man having been corrupted by sin, the light of nature and of reason was, in process of time, so diminished, and became so darkened, that it was at length almost extinguished in the generality of mankind.

In the interim, the Almighty, in His infinite mercy, vouchsafed to take the posterity of Abraham under His special protection, as His chosen people. When they had grown into a great nation, in order to preserve them from the general corruption of the rest of the world, He was pleased to give them a more clear, distinct and explicit knowledge of His sacred law; for about two thousand five hundred years after the creation, He published it externally, in a most solemn manner, comprised in a Decalogue, or Ten Commandments, which He engraved on two tables of stone. These tables were delivered to Moses by the ministry of angels, as St. Paul tells us (Galat. iii. 19), on Mount Sinai, in the midst of thunder and lightning, the fiftieth day after the children of Israel had been delivered from the bondage of Egypt, and conducted miraculously through the Red Sea into the Desert. Moses prepared himself, by a fast of forty days, for receiving the Tables of the Law, and he received them two different times; for, on finding the people adoring a golden calf, when he descended from the Mount with the first Tables in his hands, he was filled with such indignation at their idolatry, and animated with such zeal for the honor of the living God, that he dashed the Tables against the ground and broke them in pieces. After appeasing the anger of God, and sanctifying the people by his fervent prayers, he received the Tables of the Law a second time, with the express orders to lodge and preserve them always in the ark of the Testament, before the eyes of the Israelites, that the Commandments might never be obliterated or effaced out of their minds, but that they should keep them deeply imprinted on the tables of their hearts (Prov.

vii.), that they should meditate on them both night and day, and make them the invariable rule of their thoughts, words, and actions. However it became afterwards necessary to explain and establish the Divine Law on a clear and solid foundation, that mankind might be duly instructed in the manner of serving and adoring God in spirit and truth ; for the Scribes and Pharisees had begun to corrupt the true meaning of several of the Commandments, by false glosses and interpretations, and to expound them in a way agreeable to their own perverse inclinations. Hence, in about two thousand years after they had been published on Mount Sinai, they were renewed and confirmed in the evangelical law by the divine authority of Christ our Lord, who explained the genuine sense of them in clear terms, and corrected the mistaken notions and errors of the Scribes and Pharisees. He reprobated their defects and false virtues with zeal, cautioned us against their pride, hypocrisy, and vain-glory, and declared in His Gospel, that *unless our justice be more abundant than theirs, we shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven*. In short, He pointed out the perfect manner in which we are to keep all the Commandments, both internally and externally, both in great and small matters, and to perform all the duties enjoined us with a pure intention of pleasing God, and seeking only His honor and glory in all we do. Far from abrogating the law of the Decalogue, He inculcated the indispensable obligation and absolute necessity of observing it inviolably to the end of the world, as a rule by which we are to be directed and guided in our pilgrimage through this place of probation and banishment from our heavenly country. *I am come* (says He, Matt. v. 17), *not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it* ; and to show the permanency and duration of this divine law, He immediately adds (v. 18), *Amen, I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall not pass of the law, till all be fulfilled*.

The ceremonial part of the Old Law, which was given to and intended only for the Jewish people, has indeed been abrogated, and the forms of judgment which regarded the external policy and civil government of their nation have ceased to be binding since the promulgation of the Gospel ; but the law of the Ten Commandments, being an external manifestation of God's eternal law, and containing the moral and natural duties of man to God and to his neighbor, continues still to be as binding as ever. Hence it is, that when the young man in the Gospel put this question to our Saviour, *What must I do to possess eternal life?* He replied, *If thou wilt enter into life, keep the Commandments* ;

whence it is evident that the observance of the Commandments is required as a necessary condition of salvation. It is not sufficient to keep some of them, but the whole of them must be observed ; for, as St. James says (ii. 10), *Whosoever shall keep the whole law, but offend in one point, is become guilty of all*, that is to say, he becomes a transgressor of the law in such a manner that the observance of all the other points will not avail him to salvation. The reason is, because a grievous offense against any one precept destroys charity, and, of course, defeats the end of the whole law, the chief end of whatever the divine law commands or forbids being charity. It is herein that true perfection consists. This is the foundation *on which the whole law and the prophets depend*, as Christ our Lord speaks (Matt. xxii. 40), and for this reason the Apostle says, *He who loveth hath fulfilled the law*. In fine, the whole tendency of all the Commandments is to implant the holy love of charity in our souls, and to excite us to recover that happy union with God which we lost by the fall of Adam.

The two tables on which the Ten Commandments were engraven denote the two branches and precepts of charity : *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart*, and *Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself*. All the Commandments are reducible to these two precepts. The three Commandments of the first Table of the Divine Law are comprised in the first precept : for they point out the duties we owe to God, and prescribe the three different ways in which we are bound to honor Him: first, with our hearts; secondly, with our tongues; and thirdly, with our deeds and actions. The seven Commandments of the second Table are comprised in the second precept of charity, for they teach us our duty to our neighbor and to ourselves, and direct us to do no kind of injury to another, either in his person, his life, his virtue, his honor, his character or his goods, even in thought or desire, but to wish him well, and to do him all the good, according to our ability, that his necessities require ; so that the whole law and Commandments, and all our duties and obligations, may be said to be briefly comprehended in these few words : *Love God above all things, and thy neighbor as thyself*. This is the very end of our being. It is for this purpose we have been placed in this world, and on this depends our real happiness both in time and eternity.

The best proof we can give of our having a true love for God is, to keep His Commandments, according to the words of our Saviour : *He that loves me keeps my Commandments*. It is not enough to believe

all that He has taught ; we must likewise obey what He has commanded, and faithfully observe His sacred law, in order to work our salvation. It is true, indeed, we can do nothing conducive to salvation by our own natural strength alone ; we are not even capable of a good thought, as of ourselves. All our sufficiency is from God, who is never wanting on His part, but always ready to assist His servants, and to give them such a supply of His divine grace as enables them to keep His Commandments, and to say with St. Paul : *I can do all things in Him who strengthens me ; not I, but the grace of God with me.* The obligation we are under to keep the Commandments renders it necessary for us to know them well ; for how can we obey what we do not know ? How shall we comply with the various duties which they prescribe, and shun the vices which they forbid, if we be ignorant of the sense and meaning of the words ? We are therefore to remark, that the Commandments are partly positive or affirmative, and partly negative precepts ; that is to say, they command something and forbid something ; they order us to practice certain acts of virtue, and they direct us to shun the opposite vices. The positive precepts are binding only at those times, and in those circumstances where the law of God requires the performance of such acts of virtue as they command ; but the negative precepts, which command us to abstain from evil, are binding at all times and in all circumstances, because it can never be lawful to do any thing that is forbidden by God's law. Thus, for example, though the First Commandment of the second Table orders us to honor our father and mother, yet this does not at all times oblige us to be actually employed in the exercise of this honor and respect ; but the same Commandment forbids us to dishonor our father and mother, and, therefore, we are obliged never to show them any dishonor or disrespect at any time, or on any occasion whatsoever. The same is to be observed in all the other Commandments, as will appear more fully from the explanation of each Commandment in particular.

Some divide the First Commandment into two, and join the two last in one, making thus four Commandments in the first Table, and six in the second ; but in reality, what they make two Commandments is only one and the same ; for when God says, *Thou shalt have no other God but me*, He plainly forbids us to worship any other being whatsoever, as God, but Himself alone ; and when He afterward adds, *Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven thing*, &c., He only forbids in particular what is forbidden before in general terms, so that the whole is but one

complete and perfect prohibition of the horrid crime of idolatry. As for the two last Commandments, they prohibit two distinct sins, *lust* and *injustice*, and are, therefore, two distinct precepts; for two sins of a different nature are not usually committed by a transgression of one and the same Commandment. The external acts of lust and injustice are forbidden by two distinct Commandments, the sixth and the seventh. In like manner the inward acts and desires of these vices equally require to be forbidden by two distinct Commandments; the ninth and the tenth. This division has been always more universally adopted by the faithful, used by the Septuagint, and approved by the ancient Fathers as the most conformable to reason, though John Calvin has thought proper to reject it; but the dispute raised by him about the manner of dividing the Commandments seems to be of no great importance, provided they be entirely acknowledged and duly observed, without either adding or diminishing, especially as the Scripture does not mention which of them is the first, second, or third, &c. Every word they contain is expressed in our Bibles and large Catechisms, precisely as they were originally delivered to Moses, and inserted in the book of Exodus, ch. xx.

The following words are premised to them by way of preface: *I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, and out of the house of bondage.* Hereby the Almighty reminds mankind of the infinite power, supreme dominion and authority of His divine majesty, in order to impress us with a just sense of our duty and indispensable obligation to respect and obey His sacred law with greater fidelity. After the aforesaid preamble, the First Commandment begins thus: *Thou shalt have no strange gods before me*, or what is the same sense, *Thou shalt have no other God but me.* This Commandment is partly affirmative and partly negative. The affirmative part establishes true religion, the negative part forbids false religion. By the first part, we are ordered to acknowledge God's sovereign dominion over us, and to worship Him with the supreme honor of *Latria*. By the second part, we are prohibited to worship idols, or to give to any creature the honor due to God alone. It was to caution the children of Israel against the worship of such idols or false Gods, that the following words were immediately joined to this Commandment, by way of an explanation to it: *Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven thing, &c.*, that is, according to the ancient version of the Septuagint, which is venerable for having been made use of by the Apostles themselves, *Thou shalt not make*

to thyself any graven idol, or image of false gods. The Almighty did not judge it sufficient to forbid the Israelites in general terms, to have no other God before Him, but was pleased also to prohibit the abominable crime of idolatry in express terms; for as the people of Israel were already prone to this vice, and as they were then going into the land of the Canaanites, who adored and offered sacrifice to many idols and false deities, it was necessary to give them a full and particular explanation of this Commandment, lest they should be corrupted by the Gentiles, and induced by their example to make graven idols, or images of false Gods, in order *to adore and worship them*, as the Commandment expressly says: Wherefore the words, *Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven thing*, &c. added to the former, *Thou shalt have no strange gods before me*, made in reality but one and the same entire Commandment, composed of two parts, which forbid one kind of sin in substance, that is, the making and worshipping such statues and images as are set up to be honored, *served and adored* for God, or in which some divinity, virtue and power is believed to reside, as the generality of the Gentiles, who adored stocks and stones, and worshipped the sun, the moon, the stars, and other creatures, as deities, did believe (Rom. i. 25). Nay, as we read (Exod. xxxii.), the Israelites themselves, corrupted by their bad example, made a golden calf in the wilderness, worshipped it as their god, and sacrificed to it, dancing round it and saying; *These are thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt.* It is also related (1 Kings xii.), that Jeroboam made two calves of gold and offered sacrifice to them, saying, *Behold thy gods, O Israel, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt.*

It is such idolatrous practices as these that the First Commandment forbids, and not the relative honor and respect that is shown to the images and pictures of Christ and His saints, in grateful remembrance of the prototypes which they represent. It is evident, from the Scripture, that even in the Old Law, the making of images was not entirely disused nor absolutely forbidden, but only conditionally, so *as not to worship or adore them as gods.* The Lord Himself commanded Moses to make two golden cherubims of image work, and place them over the oracle in the sanctuary (Exod. xxv). Moses also erected a brazen serpent in the Desert (Num. xxi.), and Solomon (3 Kings, vi.), is said to have placed large images of cherubs in the temple he built at Jerusalem. In the New Law, sacred images and pictures have been always in use, since the earliest and purest ages of Christianity, as Tertullian, Eusebius,

St. John Chrysostom, St. Augustine, &c., testify. Leo Isauricus was the first that declared open war against sacred images, and ordered the image of Christ, which Constantine the Great had erected, to be pulled down off the grand gate of the imperial palace. Hence the heresy of the Iconoclastics, or image-breakers, took its rise, but was afterward condemned in the second General Council of Nice, which, insisting upon the ancient pious practice, decreed that sacred images should be placed in churches as before, and honored with a relative honor, as they relate to Christ and His saints, and are memorials of them.

The same judgment is to be formed of the relics of the saints, which have been the instruments of all sorts of virtues, and are to be one day reunited to their glorious souls. It is not forbidden to enshrine and honor them with an inferior and relative honor. We read in the book of Exodus, xiii., that the people of God had such a veneration for the remains of the Patriarch Joseph, that when they were leaving Egypt they took particular care to carry his bones with them, and to preserve them during their voyage through the Desert. The Scripture also relates (Kings, book iii.), that a lion guarded the body of a prophet, that the vessel of manna, with Aaron's rod, was, by the orders of God, deposited in the Ark of the Covenant, and kept with great veneration in the Holy of Holies, as lasting monuments of his power and mercy to the Israelites. It appears, from all kinds of monuments of antiquity, that the veneration of relics in the New Law is as ancient as Christianity itself. The primitive Christians set a greater value on them than gold and precious stones, and preserved them as an inestimable treasure, as Eusebius assures us—Hist. 1. 4. ch. 15. They came from remote countries in quest of the bodies of the holy martyrs, and exposed themselves to the manifest danger of losing their lives for the sake of obtaining a portion of their relics. When St. Cyprian was beheaded, they spread out their handkerchiefs under him, in order to receive one drop of his blood, as it fell to the ground—Euseb. 1. 4. ch. xv. and 1. 8. ch. vi. It was this zeal for preserving the relics of the holy martyrs that enraged the heathen emperors and persecutors of the Church to that degree, that they ordered the bodies of the martyrs to be sometimes devoured by wild beasts, sometimes to be thrown into the sea, tied to a huge stone, sometimes to be burnt to ashes, and the ashes to be thrown against the wind, lest any part of them should fall into the hands of the Christians. All ancient writers attest and approve of this veneration of relics, nor

is it disapproved of by any of them, except Julian the Apostate, Eunomius, Vigilantius, and such like enemies of the Christian religion. God Himself has frequently approved of it by working a great number of illustrious prodigies, which He never would have done had it not been agreeable to Him that the relics of His saints should be honored and respected. Among several other unexceptionable witnesses, St. Augustine (1. 22, de civ. c. viii.), and St. Ambrose (ep. 85), assert that they were ocular witnesses to many great miracles wrought at the translation of the relics of St. Stephen, St. Gervase, and St. Protase. We read (4 Kings, xiii.) that the body of a dead man was restored to life by touching the bones of Eliseus, in the sepulchre; and in ch. xix. of the Acts of the Apostles, v. 12, it is recorded that the handkerchiefs and aprons that touched the body of St. Paul, cast out devils and cured all diseases. The very shadow of St. Peter also cured many sick persons, for which reason the sick and infirm were brought into the streets, and laid there on beds and couches, that the shadow of St. Peter passing by might overshadow some of them—Acts. v.

But is not all veneration of the angels and saints forbidden by the First Commandment? It is forbidden to pay them the supreme honor that belongs to God alone, but it is not forbidden to honor them as God's special friends, because in so doing it is God we honor in them, All our devotion to them centres in God, and tends principally to His glory. Him alone we adore and worship for His own sake, as our Sovereign Lord. To Him alone we pay the supreme homage. For His sake we honor the angels and saints as His creatures and servants, and not as gods, or the authors and disposers of pardon, grace and salvation, but with an inferior honor, infinitely beneath the honor due to God. It is certainly lawful to honor and reverence those whom God Himself, as the Royal Prophet says (Psalms, cxxxviii.), has so highly honored and exalted in His kingdom, by confirming them in grace and crowning them in glory. And since the Scripture teaches us (Tob. xi. 12. Apocal. 5, viii. 3), that one of their employments in heaven is to pray for us, and to present our prayers to God, it must be lawful for us to desire and request them to do so. They are full of zeal to contribute to our salvation, and full of charity to help us. They have now more power with God to assist us by their prayers, and more charity to move them to it, than if they were here below on earth. They know our wants, and see in God as in a mirror, all that has any connection with His glory and our safety and happiness. We, therefore, beg their

prayers and intercession, from a conviction that their prayers are better and more effectual than our own, and that this is no more robbing God of His honor, or doing any injury to the mediatorship of Christ, than to desire the prayers of God's faithful servants upon earth. The distance of place is no obstruction to their hearing our petitions, because they hear not by ears but by understanding. The Gospel tells us (Luke, xv. 7), that they rejoice upon one sinner doing penance more than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance. How can they rejoice at it if they do not know it? The rich man mentioned (Luke xvi.) was not ignorant of the situation of his five brethren upon earth, but solicitous and concerned for their welfare, though he himself was buried in hell. It is related (1 Kings, xxviii.) that Samuel, being dead, heard the prayers made to him by the Pythouissa, at the request of Saul. Nay, it is readily granted that the devils themselves, by the light of nature, know our works, and hear the imprecations and blasphemies of their wicked invokers, *The accuser*, &c.—Apocal. xii. 10. How can such a knowledge as this be reasonably denied to the angels and saints, who, besides the light of nature, enjoy the light of glory, and of the eternal word, who is the living image and expression of all that God has created? God has heretofore given the prophets a knowledge of future things at a great distance. Eliseus knew all that passed between his servant and Naaman the Assyrian, and in the King of Syria's bedchamber, though he was no more present to them than if he had been in heaven—4 Kings, 6. Nay, though it were even supposed, but not granted, that the angels and saints did not know or hear our prayers in particular, yet it would be still useful and beneficial to invoke their intercession, because as St. Augustine remarks, *de cura mort* (c. xvi.), they pray for all Christians in general, and more particularly for such as desire the assistance of their prayers, as we pray for the dead, without seeing them or knowing where they are, or what they do. The Scripture informs us (Mach. ii. xii. xiv. xv.), that Onias and Jeremias prayed after their death for the people of their nation. The tutelar angel prayed for the people of Jerusalem and the cities of Juda (Zachar. i. 12), and the kingdom of Persia—Dan. x. The angel Raphael carried up the prayers of Tobias to the Lord—Tob. 12. Jacob also, on his death-bed, prayed his guardian angel to bless the children of Joseph; and Loth prayed to the angel to spare the city of Segor, and he heard his prayer—Gen. xlviii. and 19, 21. St. John prayed for grace from the seven spirits that stand before the throne (Apocal. i. 4), and the

four-and-twenty elders had golden vials, full of odors and prayers, which they offered up to God—Apocal. v. As for the words of St. Paul (Colos. ii. 18), he only condemns the superstitious worship either of bad angels (v. 15), or of good angels, such as several of the philosophers among the Colossians (v. 8), and the disciples of Simon the magician were guilty of; for they shook off Christ Jesus, who is the head of His Church and offered sacrifice to angels, whom they looked upon to be the creators of the world, the givers of the law, and the mediators and saviours of mankind, even above Jesus Christ, which the Apostle expresses here by these words, *not retaining Christ the head*.

The stupidity and grossness of the sin of idolatry is so glaring and so opposite to the dictates of natural reason, that few, or none, in these civilized parts of the world, arrive to such a degree of blindness and insensibility, as to be guilty of it. There is, however, another more subtle kind of idolatry, which is but too common in the very midst of Christianity; for the sworn enemy of mankind, finding that since the establishment of the Christian religion he was no longer worshipped by external and visible idols, has taken care to substitute inward invisible idols in their place, as St. Augustine remarks. He does not excite us at present to offer sacrifice to a Jupiter, a Mars, or a Venus, or to erect Gods of metal, stone, or wood, in outward temples, in order to pay Him divine honors under such figures, but he persuades many amongst us to set up spiritual idols in the middle of their hearts, and in the interior temple of their souls. He tempts them to hoard up images of gold and silver in their coffers, to adore them in their cabinets, to worship them as a deity, and to sacrifice their thoughts, their affections, and cares to them. Hence, St. Augustine says, "Be not deceived, my brethren, you adore and serve as many idols and false Gods as you are slaves to different passions and vices, and as you love created objects with an inordinate affection. Every thing that you love better than God is your idol and your God. The object of every disorderly passion is an idol which you adore on the altar of your heart, and serve as much as any heathen did his idols." In this sense, St. Paul (Rom. xvi.) says, that the *Glutton's god is his belly*; and (Coloss. iii.) he calls the *sin of avarice idolatry*, because money is the idol in which the miser places his affections and sovereign happiness. Others make idols of themselves, others make their idols of pride, others of vain-glory, others of lust, others of something else, says St. John Chrysostom. God has only the second place in their hearts; they occupy the first place themselves. They

love Him on their own account, They serve Him, not for His sake, but for their own. It is true, they do not offer up sheep or oxen to outward idols, as the heathens did in former ages ; but they do worse in offering up their immortal souls as a sacrifice to their concupiscence. These idols, which the devil, the world, and the flesh solicit them to erect in the middle of their hearts, and in the temple of their souls, are the hardest to be extirpated, and ought to be no less avoided than the idols of the ancient Pagans.

Besides idolatry, the First Commandment forbids the sins of infidelity, presumption, despair, simony, sacrilege, violation of lawful vows, with all the different species of superstition, heathenish and vain observations of omens, dreams, charms, divination, fortune-telling or foretelling of future things, discovering the effects of man's free will, and secrets impenetrable to nature, by having recourse to vain signs and improper means, that are not appointed by God, nor authorized by His Church, nor have any natural virtue, dependence or connection with the end proposed. For as this commandment obliges us to worship the true and living God, by the virtues of faith, hope, charity, and religion, so it likewise forbids all the vices that are opposite to these virtues. In short, it commands us to worship and adore the Lord our God, *in spirit and truth*, both internally and externally, with the soul and with the body. To *adore Him in spirit*, is to be firmly persuaded in our understanding that He is a being of infinite majesty, and of infinite perfection. To *adore Him in truth*, is to adhere to Him with all the affections of soul, to subject ourselves to Him by a perfect obedience to His holy will, and to testify His sovereign dominion over us, and our own entire dependence on Him, by acts of religion, such as prayer, adoration, oblation and sacrifice. In vain do we pretend to adore Him by external acts of adoration, unless they proceed from, and be accompanied with the internal dispositions of our souls. They are but a false, lying, and hypocritical adoration, without the internal homage and worship of the heart, like unto the adoration of the unhappy soldiers who, at the time of our Saviour's passion, *bent their knee before Him and cried out, Hail, King of the Jews*. The Lord complaining of such adorers, says in the Scripture : *This people honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. In vain do they worship me.*—Matt. xv. 8, 9.

In the conclusion of this commandment the Almighty, who is jealous or angry with those who give His honor to any other being, proposes

rewards and punishments ; for rewards and punishments being the great support of all laws, it was proper they should be mentioned in the conclusion of this Commandment ; hence the following appendix is joined to it : *I am the Lord thy God, strong and jealous, visiting the sins of the fathers upon their children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, and showing mercy to thousands of those that love me and keep my Commandments.* The punishment denounced against the transgressors of God's Commandments is both temporal and eternal. The temporal punishment in this world is sometimes extended to the third and fourth generation ; for though no one is punished for the sins of another to which he is by no means accessory, it being just that he who sins should undergo the pain, according to these words of the prophet (Ezekiel, xviii.) : *The son shall not carry the iniquity of the father, nor the father the iniquity of the son,* yet God justly visits the sins of the fathers upon wicked ungodly children, who imitate the evil example, and enter into the injustices of their wicked parents—Prov. xxxiv. ; Kings, iv. 22. And though such parents and their children should happen sometimes to escape the temporal punishment due to their sins, yet their whole posterity will not escape it, for it is transmitted to the children of their children, *even to the third and fourth generation.* This is what they have to expect who *hate God*, that is to say, who break His Commandments ; for as they who keep the Commandments are truly said to *love God*, so they who break them are said to *hate Him*, at least in effect, whereby they entail not only a temporal punishment, but also eternal ruin and damnation on themselves and on their wicked children, who, like themselves, break God's law. But if the punishment with which they are threatened be so great, the reward promised to such as observe His laws is still greater and more extensive. He is angry with the third and fourth generation of those who hate Him, but He shows mercy to thousands of those that love Him and keep His Commandments. What a comfort is it to have so good and so bountiful a master ? Here we plainly see how His mercy surpasses His justice, and that He takes more delight in rewarding than in punishing. The reward He promises His faithful servants is infinite and incomprehensible, being nothing less than *life everlasting*, nothing less than the kingdom of Heaven—Matt. xix. 17.

The Second Commandment, *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain. for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that shall take the name of the Lord his God in vain.* We are hereby ordered

to honor, bless and praise God's holy name, and forbid to profane or dishonor it by false, unjust, rash, and unnecessary oaths, blasphemous expressions, maledictions and curses, either of ourselves or others.

The Third Commandment, *Remember to keep holy the Sabbath-day*, &c. directs us to spend the Lord's day in a holy rest, in exercise of piety, charity and mercy; and it forbids all unnecessary servile work and labor, and whatever is incompatible with a religious observance of the Sabbath.

The Fourth Commandment, *Honor thy father and mother*, &c. enforces the mutual obligations of parents and children, superiors and subjects, masters and mistresses; and it forbids every thing that is contrary to their respective duties. [See the Discourse *On the duties of Parents. On the duties of Children. On the duties of Husbands and Wives. On the duties of Masters and Servants*].

The Fifth Commandment, *Thou shalt not kill*, enjoins all the work of mercy, both spiritual and corporal, particularly pardon of injuries, alms-deeds, and fraternal correction, or a charitable admonition to be given to our neighbor, when we see him in danger of being led astray, or doing any thing that is prejudicial to the eternal salvation of his soul. It forbids murder and every sin that has a natural tendency, either directly, or indirectly, to take away the life of our neighbor's body or soul, such as fighting, quarrelling, rioting, wounding, anger, envy, hatred, revenge, scandal, and bad example. The very thoughts and will of committing murder, and the desire of any person's death, come under this prohibition; for it is in the heart and will that murder is first committed, and the passions are the roots and springs from whence all the injuries done to our neighbor's person arise. For this reason our Blessed Saviour says in the Gospel, *You have heard that it was said to them of old, Thou shalt not kill; but I say to you, that whosoever is angry with his brother, shall be in danger of the judgment—Matt. v. 21, 22.* St. John also says (i. 3, 15), *Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer hath life eternal abiding in himself.* Of all the injuries that can be done to our neighbor, murder is the greatest, as it deprives him not only of life, and of every thing that is dear to him in this world, but also endangers the eternal loss of his soul. The Scripture ranks wilful murder at the head of those sins *which cry aloud to Heaven for vengeance.* There is no crime that man can commit which carries with it a greater horror and remorse. Cain, who was the first murderer, is a remarkable instance hereof. Conscious

of the enormity of this crime, even before the written law was given, his guilt flew immediately in his face, covered him with confusion, and tortured his mind so cruelly that he at length fell into despair, and cried out that his *wickedness was too great to deserve forgiveness*. Nothing can ever make it lawful for any one directly to procure, concur to, or hasten his own death. Whoever deliberately lays violent hands upon himself is guilty of a heinous injury against God, the author of his life, for he destroys the image of God, and usurps an authority which only belongs to God, who is the sole master of life and death. He is also guilty of a heinous injury against the community, which he robs of a member, and against himself, by taking away his own corporal life, of which he is only appointed the keeper, and which, of all temporal blessings, is the most valuable. He likewise entails eternal damnation on his soul by a direct violation of the Fifth Commandment, for this crime is usually connected with final impenitence and eternal enmity with God. To murder another is the greatest injustice a man can commit against his neighbor, as has been already observed. Suicide, or self-murder, is of course a crime so much more enormous, as the justice and charity which every one owes to himself, especially to his own immortal soul, which is hereby destroyed with the body, is stricter and of a superior order to that which he owes to his neighbor. The nearer the person killed is allied to the murderer, the greater is the crime that he commits; consequently as no one can be so nearly related to a person as himself, there can be no murder so criminal as the murdering of one's self. It is totally subversive of that strong principle of self-preservation which is deeply imprinted in the heart of man by nature itself. Those who can act deliberately in opposition to so powerful a principle must have their reason strangely perverted, or their mind blinded by the most unnatural passions. The only example of the kind we read of in the Old Testament, is that of the impious, proud, self-conceited Achitophel (2 Kings, xvii.), who hung himself in a fit of vexation, because his advice was not taken; and the only instance in the New Testament, is that of the unhappy apostate Judas, who, after having betrayed and sold his Divine Master, hung himself in despair, and breathed his impious soul into the jaws of Satan, by whom he was actuated. The misfortune both of the one and the other should deter all Christians in particular from taking them for their model, and extinguishing the most evident principles of reason, and the voice of nature and religion, so far as to look upon suicide in distress as a remedy against

miseries, and deem it an act of courage. On the contrary, it springs from a total want of courage, and implies the utmost excess of pusillanimity, impatience, and cowardice; for to bear all kinds of sufferings with an unshaken constancy is true courage and greatness of soul, and the test and triumph of virtue; whereas, to sink under misfortunes is the most unworthy baseness of soul.

They are guilty of self-murder who accelerate their own death by criminal excesses, surfeits, and intemperance, for their health is thereby impaired, as by a slow poison; infirmities and disorders are contracted, and their days are cut short, according to these words of the Scripture: *In much meat there shall be infirmity, and many have died by surfeits, but he that is temperate shall prolong his life*, (Eccles. xxxi.); and again, *Wine has killed many*, &c. St. Augustine (Tract. 12, in Jo.) says, that they are accessory to their own death who will not observe the advice and prescriptions of the physicians, nor take the necessary medicines in their sickness, nor use proper precautions for the preservation of their life. They who, like the children slaughterers, Pharaoh and Herod, destroy their own infants to hide their shame, or recommend and make use of things to procure and cause abortion, are guilty of a most grievous transgression of this Fifth Commandment. Nay, they are highly blamable who lay their young infants, at least the first year, in the same bed with themselves, their nurses, or their servants, because they are thereby exposed to the danger of being overlaid and oppressed in their sleep. The Scripture relates a remarkable instance hereof—3 Kings, iii. St. Ambrose says, that they are guilty of murder who, having it in their power, do not relieve the poor in extreme necessity, but let them perish for want, as the rich glutton did to poor Lazarus, and the Priest and Levite did to the man that was lying wounded and half dead on the road of Jerico—Luke x. *Feed those who are famishing with hunger*, says the aforesaid holy Doctor: *If thou hast not fed them, thou hast killed them. Thou art guilty of as many murders as there are poor who die with hunger in the place where thou livest.*

But what judgment is to be formed of duelling? They are guilty of a manifest breach of the divine commandment, *Thou shalt not kill*, who either challenge or accept of a challenge, and fight a duel. The Lombard laws indeed authorized duels, but only with a buckler and clubs.—*Cum fustibus et Clypeo*. This execrable practice of barbarous extraction became more pernicious when more dangerous weapons were used, and it was usurped by private authority, though it is in itself an

unnatural crime, unknown to the Jews, Greeks, Romans, and to all the civilized nations most renowned for true valor. Since the challenge sent by Francis I., King of France, to the Emperor Charles, this crime, by maxims equally shocking to reason and religion, passes in the eyes of many for a test of heroism and courage, and a point of honor, by a false prostitution of these names. True fortitude enables a Christian to bear all manner of affronts for the sake of virtue and duty. Nothing is more opposite to this heroic disposition, nothing more dastardly than not to be able to look a little humiliation in the face, or bear a trifling offense with patience and constancy. Nothing more inconsistent with the character of a Christian than to trample upon the favorite commandment of Christ, and transgress all laws, both divine and human, rather than brook with a petty injury. To forgive injuries, and to suffer with humility for the love of God, is the distinguishing mark of a Christian, and the very soul of the divine law. It is a glorious victory gained over ourselves, by which we vanquish our passions, and improve in our souls the habits of those divine virtues, in which consists the spirit of Christianity and the resemblance we are commanded to bear to Jesus Christ. Hence the General Council of Trent, wishing to extirpate from the Catholic world the unchristian and detestable practice of duelling, has pronounced an excommunication not only against those who challenge and accept, or fight a duel, but also against all their seconds, adherents, assistants, spectators, and abettors, who co-operate in any shape, either by counsel, advice, favor, or carrying the challenge, and forbids Christian burial to such as die in a duel.

The Sixth Commandment, *Thou shalt not commit adultery*, enjoins chastity, sobriety, and temperance, and forbids impurity, gluttony, and drunkenness, and whatever tends to inflame the passions. Christ our Lord adds to this commandment in the Gospel, and declares that *who-soever looketh at a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart*—Matt. v. 28. The vice of lust is particularly sinful in Christians, because it defiles what they become by baptism, *the members of Jesus Christ, and the temples of the Holy Ghost*—1 Cor. vi.

The Seventh Commandment, *Thou shalt not steal*, obliges us to discharge our just and lawful debts, to pay servants' wages and workmen's hire; to render to every one his own, &c. It forbids all theft, robbery, fraud, usury, and extortion; all manner of cheating in buying and selling, using false weights and measures, receiving stolen goods,

co-operating in the theft, and retaining another's property unreasonably against his will.

The Eighth Commandment, *Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor*, directs us to speak and witness the truth in all things, both in our conversation and in our judgments, to defend the reputation of the absent, to repair our neighbor's character to the best of our power; if we have hurt it, to retract the falsehood we have advanced to his prejudice. It forbids calumny, detraction, rash judgments, false testimonies, and all kind of malicious, exclusive, and officious lies, whether in jest or earnest, in words or actions.

The Ninth Commandment, *Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife*, orders us to keep a watchful guard over our hearts and senses, to shun the dangerous occasions of sin, to resist and reject with horror all unchaste thoughts at their first appearance.

The Tenth Commandment, *Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's goods*, &c. enjoins justice, even in wish and desire, and it forbids all willful thoughts of unlawful gain, and all unjust desires of our neighbor's goods and profits, which is the vice of avarice and covetousness.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

A SHORT AND PLAIN EXPOSITION OF THE LORD'S PRAYER.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. The glory of a Christian.
- II. The meaning of "Our Father."
- III. The seven petitions of the Lord's Prayer.
- IV. Peroration.

And Jesus, hearing this, wondered and said, to those that followed him: Amen I say to you, I have not found so great faith in Israel. And I say unto you, that many shall come from the East and the West, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.— St. Matt. c. viii. v. 10, 11.

OF all vocal prayers, the Lord's Prayer is the most perfect and the most excellent; it is the model and pattern of all other prayers; nay, all other prayers are but a paraphrase upon it, for it contains the substance of all things that we may and ought to demand of God, and it

is an abridgment of all that we are to hope for, as the Creed is an abridgment of all that we are to believe. Tertullian calls it a compendium of the Gospel. St. Augustine styles it the daily prayer of every Christian, and recommends it as a remedy against the sins of every day. In fine, the universal Church holds it in such high esteem, that it has inserted it in the most holy Sacrifice of the Mass, to the end that all the faithful, united in one body, should join together with the Priest in offering up this heavenly address to the Divine Majesty, in the name of Jesus Christ, who was the author of it, and who vouchsafed to dictate the very words it contains. It is composed of a short preface, and seven petitions or requests, whereof the three first directly regard the honor and glory of God, and the four last our own good, both for our souls and bodies, together with the evils from which we beg to be delivered. These words, *Our Father, who art in heaven*, make up the preface. We are taught to say, *our Father*, rather than *my Father*, because we are all brethren in Jesus Christ, and children of the same Heavenly Father. All men, both rich and poor, are called to the same inheritance, without distinction, and are brethren in Jesus Christ, notwithstanding the diversity of their states. Consequently they ought to have a mutual love and charity for each other, and pray not only for themselves, but for all mankind in common. It is to inculcate these duties that our Blessed Saviour teaches us to say *our Father*, and not *my Father*; but if the word *our* includes charity and brotherly love for our neighbor, the word *Father*, which is added to it, ought to inspire us with sentiments of charity and love for God. By this sweet name we are reminded of His goodness to us, and of our duty and obligation to love and serve Him, and to behave like worthy children of so great a Father. We are hereby reminded of the great benefit of our creation, and of our being made His adoptive children and heirs of life everlasting; for it is by creation and adoption that God is our Father. By creation He is the Father of all His creatures; but by adoption He is, in a particular manner, the Father of all good Christians. *See what excessive charity the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be named, and should be the children of God*, cries out St. John—Ep. i. iii. 1. But if we be children, we are likewise heirs, as St. Paul remarks (Rom. viii. 17), *heirs indeed of God, and co-heirs of Christ* (v. 29), *who is the first-begotten among many brethren, and who is not ashamed to call them his brethren*—Heb. ii. 11.

O Christians! what an honor, what a happiness for us to be chil-

dren of God, brethren of Jesus Christ, and heirs of the kingdom of Heaven? Many boast of their corporal birth, whereby they come into the world defiled with sin, children of anger, slaves of Satan and confederates of hell; but how few are there to be found who set any great value on, or even entertain a serious thought of their spiritual birth by baptism, which raises them from the miserable state of children of perdition to the great dignity of the children of God, and gives them a right to call the King of Kings, and the Creator of heaven and earth, their *Father*? Hence St. Paul says (Rom. viii. 14), *Whosoever are led by the spirit of God, they are the sons of God*; and (v. 15), *You have not received the spirit of bondage again in fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry, Abba*, that is to say, *Father*. Nothing less than an express order of Jesus Christ was necessary to authorize us, poor worms of the earth, and miserable creatures, defiled with many sins, and unworthy to be named even servants of God; nothing less, I say, than an express order of Christ was necessary to authorize us, before we could dare to make use of this noble title, and call the Lord by the name of *Our Father*. Therefore the priest, as a public minister of the Church, before he begins in the name of the whole congregation to recite the Lord's Prayer in the holy Sacrifice of the Mass, premises the following words: *Præceptis salutaribus moniti, &c.* that is to say, *being admonished by salutary precepts, and instructed by divine institution, we venture to take the liberty of saying, Our Father, &c.*

This most endearing title of *Father* is placed in the very beginning of this prayer, rather than that of King, Lord, or the like forbidding terms? Why so? not only to inspire us with sentiments of charity, but also to animate our hope, and make us approach the throne of grace with greater confidence; for as children, in their distresses and necessities, go with more confidence to their father for succor and relief, because a father has naturally a tenderness for his children, and is inclined to assist them to the utmost of his power; so, in like manner, we may and ought the more confidently to cry out to the Almighty for help, and conceive the most firm hope of succeeding and obtaining from His mercy everything we stand in need of, as we are ordered to go to Him, not as slaves to their Lord, but in quality of children to their *Father*. After this endearing title, in which so much is comprehended, the following words are added: *Who art in heaven*. Mention is here made of *Heaven*, to give us to understand, that when we begin our prayers, we ought

to raise our thoughts and minds to Heaven, and seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of the Father, and not the things that are upon the earth, as St. Paul speaks—Colos. iii. But why do we not say *Our Father, who art on earth*, as well as *who art in Heaven*, since it is certain that He is not confined to any particular place, but is at the same time present in heaven, on earth, in all places, and whole in every place, both by His power, by His knowledge, and by His essence and substance? The reason why *heaven* is here particularly mentioned is: First, because it is the noblest part of the universe, and, as it were, the palace and principal seat where God resides, and manifests Himself with the greatest splendor and majesty. Secondly, He is said to be in *heaven*, in order to excite in us an ardent desire of arriving one day in those sacred mansions of bliss where He displays His glory to the blessed with so much magnificence.

The first petition of the Lord's Prayer is, *Hallowed be Thy name*; that is to say, our first request, O heavenly Father, is, that Thy name, which is always intrinsically holy in itself, may be sanctified, honored, and treated with due respect, that infidels may be converted, heretics may be brought back to the sheep-fold of the Church, schismatics may be reunited, cursers, swearers, and blasphemers may refrain from their scandalous practices; in a word, that all sinners may be reclaimed from their evil ways, and may join in promoting Thy honor, and in praising, serving, and adoring Thy Sovereign Majesty. This is the purport of the first petition, and it is placed at the head of all the rest, because a child of God ought first, and before all things, to seek the honor and glory of his Heavenly Father, according to these words of the Gospel (Matt. vi. 33), *Seek ye, therefore, first the kingdom of God, and His justice, and all these things shall be added unto you.*

The second petition is, *Thy kingdom come*. The kingdom we here sue for is not a temporal, but a spiritual kingdom; that is, the kingdom of grace in this life, and the kingdom of glory in the next, or the eternal salvation of our souls. By the kingdom of God is here meant, not only eternal glory in Heaven, which we hope for after the miseries of this life are ended, but also the grace of Jesus Christ, whereby He reigns spiritually and sovereignly in our souls here on earth, according to this saying of the Gospel (Luke xvii.), *The kingdom of God is within you*. We pray, therefore, that God may reign here in our souls by His divine grace, and that we may hereafter reign with Him for ever in the kingdom of His glory. We beg that the empire of Satan may

be overthrown ; that he may never exercise any dominion over us ; that sin may not reign over us ; that passion may not over-rule us, but that believing and practicing what Christ has ordered, we may, through His merits, be entitled to the possession of His everlasting kingdom. In fine, we pray for the extension of the spiritual kingdom of the Church, and as the Fathers of the Old Testament longed for the first coming of Christ, so, in like manner, when we say, *Thy kingdom come*, we thirst after His second coming, with a firm hope of hearing at the last day these comfortable words from His mouth : *Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom that was prepared for ye from all eternity.* This kingdom suffers violence, and it is by doing violence to corrupt nature that it is to be carried. The way is straight and the gate is narrow. If we mean to arrive one day in this kingdom, we must comply with God's holy will, by observing His laws and keeping His commandments ; for as our Blessed Saviour expressly declares, (Matt. vii 21), *Not every one that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven but he that doth the will of my Father, who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.* For this reason,

The next petition is, *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* Here we pray that all mankind may obey God, that we may be always resigned to His holy will, as well in adversity as in prosperity, and be pleased with whatever he orders for us, whether sickness, misfortunes, or death ; that we may thus imitate the Angels and Saints in heaven, who have but one will with God. Happy they who thus conform their own will to the divine will. Happy, I say, they are, because they have everything they wish and desire, as they will nothing but what God wills. Moreover, we beg that God may enable us, by His grace, to keep His commandments ; to serve Him without offending Him ; and to do His will in all things as readily, and as cheerfully, though not so perfectly, as the Angels and Saints in heaven do. This is, in a few words, the purport of the three first petitions of the Lord's Prayer. First, we are to address ourselves to God, as to our Heavenly Father, and to have a zeal for His honor, as being His children. Secondly, we must seek to inherit the kingdom He has prepared for us. Thirdly, we must be governed by His will, rather than by our own will and desires, and therefore these three petitions, *Hallowed be Thy name ; Thy kingdom come ; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven*, have the first rank, and are placed at the head of all the rest, to mark out to us

that they must over-rule all our other prayers, and be as settled principles, pre-supposed to, and implied in everything we ask.

The fourth petition is, *Give us this day our daily bread*; that is to say, all necessary food both for soul and body; for as children, who do the will of their parents, expect necessities from them, so the children of God, who do His will, and observe His laws, may confidently rely on His providential care. Every word in this petition merits our particular attention. The word *bread*, in the Scripture phrase, signifies all necessities, both spiritual and corporal. By it is meant not only the food and raiment which our bodies stand in need of, and with which St. Paul desires us to be content, but also the *spiritual bread*, or nourishment of our souls, such as the word of God, the grace of God, and the holy sacraments, especially the blessed Sacrament of the Altar, which Christ instituted for the sanctification of our souls, and which ought to be received every day in spirit and desire. Hence in the sixth chapter of St. Matthew we read, *Give us this day our superstantial bread*, from which it is evident that by the word *bread*, it is also meant the uncommon and supernatural food of the soul, which Christians ought to be in a condition to receive every day, according to these words of St. Augustine: *Live so that you may be fit to receive it every day; for if it be the daily bread of Christians, why do you only receive it once in a year?* We say in this petition, *Give us this day*, and not *give me this day*, to denote the brotherly love Christians are to have for each other, and to remind them that they are to wish unto others what they wish unto themselves, according to reason and the law of charity. *This day* is mentioned, and not *to-morrow*, to teach us that we are to recite this prayer *every day*, and after using our own endeavors, we must rely on the providence of God, without giving ourselves too much trouble, uneasiness, or anxiety of mind about the time to come, according to these words of our Saviour: *Be not solicitous for to-morrow, saying what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or with what shall we be clothed? for all these things the heathen seek after, and your father knows that you stand in need of all these things.* We are therefore to expect them from His bountiful hands, as he is the giver of all good gifts. However, a reasonable solicitude in providing for the time to come is so far from being forbidden, that it would be tempting God to depend entirely upon extraordinary means, and neglect having recourse to the lawful and ordinary methods that Christian prudence dictates, and the Author of Nature has appointed for mankind,

to acquire a competent subsistence for themselves and their families in this life. This, I say, would be tempting God, who, as the book of Genesis informs us, has condemned us all, in the person of our first parents, to earn our bread in the sweat of our brow, and in the labor of our hands, for which reason St. Paul says, *he that labors not deserves not to eat*. It is not, indeed, to our own industry or providence, but to the special bounty of God, that we are indebted for all things. It is from Him that all favors and blessings are conveyed unto us through the hands of the second causes, and therefore we are bound to pray unto Him every day, that He may be pleased to bless our endeavors, to continue His favors, and to send us everything that is necessary, for the preservation of our life here on earth. When we thus do what is required on our part, we may rest secure that the wise and benevolent Ruler of the Universe, who supported the children of Israel with manna ; who fed the Prophet Elias with bread that he sent him by a raven ; who multiplied the oil and meal of the widow of Sarephta : who satiated five thousand persons with five loaves and two fishes ; and whose provident care extends itself to the minutest thing that belongs to us : nay, even to the least hair of our heads, as the Scripture speaks (Luke, xxviii. 18), will not be wanting to us on His part. It is to be observed, that in this petition we pray for *our daily bread*, and not another man's bread ; because we are not to covet our neighbor's property, nor desire any thing that is unjustly acquired. The word *daily*, which is expressed in this petition, reminds us that we are not to demand superfluities, but necessaries, and that our request ought to be daily repeated during the time of our mortal life, because our need thereof is *daily*.

The three following petitions of the Lord's Prayer treat of the evils from which we beg to be delivered, as the four foregoing petitions treat of the goods that are necessary both for soul and body. Hence the fifth petition is, *Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us*. By *our trespasses* are meant, our sins and offenses, whereby we are made debtors to the justice of God, who by sin is robbed of the honor due to His Divine Majesty. As often as we repeat this petition, it ought to inspire us with the most profound sentiments of humility and repentance, as it reminds us that we are all sinners, and consequently, under a necessity of suing for the remission of our sins with a contrite and humbled heart. It should also serve to animate our hope, as it convinces us of the boundless mercy of the Lord ; for were He not always ready and willing to extend His mercy

to all repenting sinners, our Blessed Saviour never would have inserted these words in the daily form of prayer which He prescribed for all mankind. Besides the other conditions and terms upon which He is willing to receive us into His favor, and to pardon all our iniquities, He requires that we should forgive our brethren from our hearts the offenses and injuries they commit against us. *Forgive us as we forgive*; that is, after the same manner. Behold the condition: so that if we do not forgive them without exception, neither will our Father, who is in Heaven, forgive us our sins, as our Saviour expressly declares—Mark, xi. 15. Hence He says (Luke, xvii. 3), *Look well to yourselves: If thy brother sin against you, reprove him; and if he repent, forgive him; and if he sin against you seven times a day, and should again return to you seven times in a day, saying, I am sorry for it, forgive him.* Nay, we are not only bound to forgive all injuries from our hearts, and lay aside all animosities, desires and thoughts of revenge, but even to love our greatest enemies for God's sake, and overcome evil by good, as St. Paul speaks (Rom. xii. 20), *If thy enemy be hungry, give him to eat; if he thirst, give him drink; for, doing this, thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head.*

The sixth petition is, *And lead us not into temptation.* In this petition we pray that God may not permit us to be tempted, so as to be overcome. We beseech Him that He may not leave us to our weakness, or abandon us in the day of battle; but that He may give us grace, and enable us to resist all evil temptations, so as to come off victorious, and be entitled to that reward, which He promises in chapter ii. v. 10 of the Apocalypse: *Be thou faithful until death, and I will give thee the crown of life*; and (James, i.) *Blessed is the man who suffers temptation.* The seventh and last petition is, *But deliver us from evil.* This request is, as it were, a recapitulation of all the foregoing petitions, for to demand of God *to deliver us from evil*, is to beg of Him to preserve us from yielding to any temptation, to pardon us our sins, to give us all necessities, both spiritual and corporal, to make us do His will, thirst after His kingdom, and live so that His holy name may be sanctified by us. In fine, it is to beg of God to deliver us from all evils, past, present and to come, as the Church interprets it, both in the Mass and in the Litanies. We pray, in particular, to be delivered from mortal sin, from a hardened heart, final impenitence in this life, and from eternal damnation in the next; these being the greatest and the most dreadful of all evils that can befall either soul or body. We pray, that God

may preserve us from the deceits of the devil, who is the author of all evil ; from a sudden and unprovided death ; from the punishments due to sin, whether in purgatory or in hell ; from anger, hatred and ill-will ; from lightning and tempest ; and generally from all the temporal evils, public calamities, and miseries that are incident to human life, such as sickness, poverty, war, famine, plagues, persecutions, and such like scourges. However, when we thus pray to be delivered from temporal evils, sufferings, and afflictions, our hearts and wills must be so disposed as to choose effectually the continuance of them, if it be God's will, rather than with His displeasure to purchase a deliverance. We may pray indeed for a deliverance, but conditionally, and with resignation to the divine will, provided that God sees it to be conducive to His honor, and expedient for the salvation of our souls that we should be delivered from them ; otherwise we pray that He may give us grace to bear them patiently. This condition is implied in the aforesaid petition, wherein we only beg to be delivered from what is evil. Now, properly speaking, nothing is evil with regard to us but what obstructs our salvation, or is an obstacle to our future happiness ; consequently, when temporal afflictions contribute thereto, or are a necessary means of our salvation, they are not to be looked upon as evils, but as blessings, especially since it is decreed for us *to enter the kingdom of Heaven through many tribulations*, and since *a moment of tribulation (borne patiently) works in us an eternal weight of glory*, as St. Paul assures us—2 Cor. iv. Would to God this important truth was well weighed by those whom the Lord is pleased to visit with afflictions in this life, in order to spare them in the next. Instead of repining under the weight of their crosses ; instead of launching out into murmurs and complaints, or accusing Providence of partiality in the distribution of its temporal blessings ; instead of being dissatisfied when their prayers are seemingly disregarded, and their desires are not gratified in the way they request, they would acquiesce to God's will, and prefer His pleasure before their own ease ; they would without hesitation drink the cup which He presents them with, persuaded that the more bitter it is, the more salutary and healthful it will prove. In fine, they would find an inward consolation and solid peace under the sharpest trials and the most acute pains of the body. This is that peace which Christ left His disciples, which the Apostle recommended to the primitive Christians, which the holy martyrs enjoyed amidst the bitterest torments, and which nothing but a hearty submission to the will of God is able to procure. A pious Christian,

therefore, far from exulting in the prosperity of this life, should rather be alarmed at it, and dread lest it may be said to him in the next life, *Thou hast received thy reward* (Matt. vi.), or what was said to the rich glutton (Luke xvi.), *Remember thou didst receive good things in thy life-time, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.*

The word *Amen*, with which the Lord's Prayer is concluded and sealed, as St. Jerome speaks, is a Hebrew word frequently used by our Saviour, and signifying, *so be it, or let it be done*; that is, we pray that all we have sued for in the foregoing petitions may be done and granted to us. It ought to be pronounced with great recollection, and with an ardent desire of having our prayers crowned with success.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

ON THE NECESSITY OF SUBDUING OUR PASSIONS, AND PRACTICING SELF-DENIAL.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

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| I. Introduction. | | V. The tendency of natural dispositions. |
| II. The trials of the Church. | | VI. The manner of combatting the passions. |
| III. The trials of the individual. | | |
| IV. The cravings of corrupt nature. | | |
| VII. Peroration. | | |

Imperavit ventis et mari, et facta est tranquillitas magna.—Matt. c. viii. v. 26.
Jesus commanded the winds and the sea, and there came a great calm.—Matt. c. viii. v. 26.

WE read in the Gospel of this day, that our Blessed Saviour having embarked along with His disciples on board a small ship, in order to cross over the sea of Galilee, a violent storm arose, and the sea began to rage so furiously, that the ship wherein they sailed, was covered with waves, and seemed to be in imminent danger of sinking. The Evangelist tells us, that our Saviour was in the mean time asleep at the stern. Wherefore the disciples, intimidated at their situation, and apprehending that they would shortly be swallowed up in the deep, awakened Him, and cried out for relief, saying, *O Lord save us, we perish.* The Saviour of the World, moved by their cries, and attentive to their

petition, rose up in an instant, and after rebuking them for their little faith, he commanded the winds to be silent, and the sea to be still, and immediately the storm abated, and there ensued a perfect calm.

The ship wherein Christ and His disciples sailed was an emblem of the Holy Catholic Church, which, by the permission of Heaven, has been oftentimes tossed to and fro by the stormy winds of violent persecutions, and so furiously beaten by the merciless waves of several formidable heresies and schisms, that for a while she appeared to be, as it were, in a manner abandoned by Divine Providence, and in manifest danger of being wrecked and dashed to pieces. But glory be to God, the Church of Christ never was, and never will be abandoned by Heaven. She has already withstood every shock, and weathered out every storm that the powers of hell have raised against her these eighteen hundred years past, and undoubtedly she will continue to the end of time, to rise triumphantly like Noah's ark, above the raging billows of persecution, and the swelling waves of pernicious errors, since Christ Himself has promised to abide constantly with her unto the consummation of ages, and since the Holy Ghost presides continually at the helm, in order to steer and guide her in all truth, unto the very end of the world.

The members, indeed, of the Church militant must expect to meet with various adversities and tribulations, conflicts and storms, whilst they are sailing through the boisterous ocean of this mortal life. It is in vain for them to hope to be entirely exempted from such trials, until they have the happiness to arrive in the haven of a blessed eternity. In the interim, Christ our Lord appears sometimes as it were, to sleep and to neglect them, in order to try their fidelity, to exercise their patience, to increase their merit, to make them more sensible of their manifold necessities, and more fervent in imploring the succor of His divine grace. However, He never fails, in His own good time, to bring seasonable aid and relief to those who place their trust and confidence in Him, and have recourse to His mercy in the hour of distress. This should animate us to encounter every difficulty that occurs in the service of God with courage and resolution, and, like the disciples in the gospel of this day, to call devoutly on Jesus, our blessed Redeemer, to be our safeguard and protector amidst the various dangers which surround us on every side, particularly those most dangerous storms and frequent conflicts that arise from the violence of our passions, and from the depravity of the human heart; for, as the Prophet Isaias says, the heart of man is like unto a tempestuous sea, disturbed and agi-

tated by so many disorderly passions, that the ship of his soul is continually exposed to the danger of splitting on the rocks of eternal perdition, if he does not take care, with the assistance of God's grace, to regulate the motions of his heart, to check the violence of his passions, and to restrain their excesses by the practices of self-denial. It is on the necessity and advantages of this Christian virtue, that I purpose to expatiate in the following discourse. The indispensable obligation and necessity of restraining the depraved inclinations of nature, and subduing our disorderly passions, shall be the subject of the first point. The most effectual means to succeed herein shall be the subject of the second point. Let us previously implore the light of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of the Immaculate Virgin, greeting her with the words of the Angel Gabriel, *Ave Maria*, &c.

Our Blessed Saviour says (c. x. of St. Matt.), that a man's enemies are his own domestics; that is, his own self, his own corrupt nature, his own concupiscence, his own depraved inclinations and disorderly passions. These are the most dangerous enemies which we have to encounter. They deceive us under a thousand disguises, and are apt to render our very devotions liable to a thousand illusions. We have it in our power to keep out of the way of the other enemies of our souls. We can fly from the devil. We can shun the tempting allurements of the world. We can avoid the outward and immediate occasions and incentives of sin, but we cannot fly from these domestic enemies, since we always carry them about us wherever we go. It is necessary then to be prepared to wage a continual war against them, and to be armed with Christian vigilance, against every irregular symptom of an approaching temptation, that we may come off victorious in the day of battle, and preserve the inestimable treasure of virtue and innocence pure and untainted in the midst of corruption.

To deny the necessity of self-denial and mortification, both inward and outward, both spiritual and corporal, would be to destroy the whole system of Christian morality, which teaches us that the foundation of all solid virtue, and of true sanctity is to be laid by dying to ourselves, by mortifying our lusts, and by denying our own will, whatever it craves contrary to the will of God. This is the preliminary article, and the first condition that Christ lays down as necessary to enter into His service, and to become His disciples. This is the great design of all His commands, of all His counsels, of all His maxims and rules. And it is to this purpose that He declares in the gospel, that he who

hates his soul in this world, preserves it unto eternal life, and that no one can be His disciple who does not hate himself, who does not deny himself, who does not die to himself. This doctrine he illustrates by the similitude of a grain of wheat, which must die in the ground before it can bring forth fruit, giving us thereby to understand that self-love, with all its irregular lusts, corrupt inclinations, and depraved appetites, must be crucified, and must die by mortification and self-denial, before we can become truly spiritual, and bring forth the fruits of Christian virtue. Nothing can be more decisive in this point than the Sacred Scripture. One time it assures us, that *if we live according to the flesh, we shall die ; but if by the spirit we mortify the deeds of the flesh, we shall live*. Another time it declares, that *the kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, that it is to be carried by a holy violence* to our nature, that we must contend to enter into it by the narrow gate, in fine, that we must *take up our cross and follow Christ*, that is, according to the exposition of St. Augustine, that we must lead a mortified and penitential life. Such was the doctrine that St. Paul preached to the primitive Christians, when he announced the Gospel of his Divine Master, and exhorted them, both by his word and example, *to chastise their bodies, and to bear always in themselves a resemblance of the mortification of Jesus Christ*.

And indeed it appears from their uniform conduct, that they knew no other road to heaven but self-denial. The lives of the saints and great servants of God in the succeeding ages of the Church, also show that they were fully convinced of the necessity of self-denial ; they considered it as an indispensable duty, a great preservative against vice, a safe guardian of innocence, a powerful means to facilitate the subjection of the passions, and a sovereign antidote and remedy to heal the spiritual maladies and deep wounds which human nature has received from original sin. On the other hand, they looked upon a sensual, voluptuous, and epicurean life, as a manifest contradiction to the rules of the Gospel, and a barefaced violation of the sacred engagements and vows of our baptism. This made Tertullian say, that a Christian who lives up to the rules of the Gospel, and to the vows of his baptism, is a man dead to the deeds of the flesh, and to the pomps and vanities of the world ; he is a man who is spiritually crucified, and who may truly say, like St. Paul, *With Christ I am fastened to the cross ; and again, the world is crucified to me, and I to the world*. A Christian is one who has cast off the old man, with all the works of darkness, to clothe

himself with the heavenly spirit of humility and meekness of Christ, and to live conformably to the image and likeness of that Divine Original.

This doctrine, I must own, though perfectly sound and orthodox, is not very palatable to those who hearken only to the voice of flesh and blood, especially in the present age, when luxury is carried to the highest pitch, and the generality of mankind can scarce abide to hear talk of fasting, of abstinence, of self-denials, mortifications, penitential rigors, and austerities, much less to practice them. They seem to live as if they had no other end, no other object in view, but self-gratification; no other rule for their conduct but their passions and corrupt inclinations. They consider self-denial as a matter which no way concerns people engaged in the world, and pretend it belongs only to the clergy, or to such as are consecrated to religion, and shut up in a cloister, as if people in the midst of the temptations of the world were less exposed to danger, or stood in less need of works of penance, than those who, to preserve their innocence, retire from the world. Upon this erroneous ground they form a plan of life, fit, as they call it, for civilized persons. They imagine that they are at liberty to pursue pleasure, to live at their ease, to glut themselves with all the comforts of the world, to spend their days agreeably in softness, in merriment, and in a continual circle of idle amusements, diversions, and dissipations, provided they give no public scandal, refrain from the gross crimes which brand a person with infamy, keep up to the polite maxims of the age, and practice the social virtues which create esteem. But, my brethren, though such an unmortified life as this may, perhaps, make a moral heathen, it certainly is not sufficient to constitute a good Christian, nor will it be able to stand the test of the Gospel at the last day; for the very quality of a Christian, and the rule of the Gospel, which he solemnly professes, oblige a man to die to himself, to renounce all ungodliness and worldly desires, to live soberly, justly, and piously, and to combat and beat down the depraved inclinations of nature, by the practice of self-denial and mortification. This obligation extends itself indiscriminately to Christians of all ranks, states and conditions; the law of God makes no exception; the prince on the throne can no more plead an exemption than the hermit in the desert, or the religious in his cell. In spite, therefore, of all the refined persuasions of a deluded conscience, in spite of all the specious arguments that are drawn from the artifices and suggestions of self-love, it is most certain that it is the indispensable duty of every Christian to crucify the flesh with its vices and concupiscences, as the

Apostle says. It is evident to every one who is acquainted with human nature, that the passions stand in need of a severe curb, and require to be bridled and checked by frequent self-denials: they have taken a wrong bent, and must be thwarted and directed to their proper objects, in order to recover their due rectitude. Unless they are restrained, and kept under proper subjection to the spirit, they will surely rebel, and grow every day more headstrong, more stubborn and ungovernable, inso-much that a man who lets loose the reins of his passions, or takes no pains to counteract and control them, becomes at length like unto a downright slave, who is at his master's beck, always ready to obey his orders, let them be ever so extravagant; he is hurried on blindly from one criminal excess to another, and scarce knows where to stop, or how to resist the cravings of corrupt nature. His judgment is strangely biassed, his understanding is clouded, his reason is darkened, his will is perverted, and his affections are misplaced. He sees every thing that regards himself through a fallacious medium, or a kind of perspective, that either magnifies or diminishes the object. He is a stranger to all true peace, content, and tranquillity; his mind is disquieted both day and night, and agitated like unto a tempestuous sea. In fine, his heart is incessantly galled and tortured by as many cruel tyrants as he is a slave to different passions. On the contrary, a Christian who conquers himself, and governs his passions, is always quiet, settled and composed: he experiences an inward peace and content of mind, with a calm serenity and sweet evenness of soul, that surpasses all the pleasures of sense, all the satisfactions of the world. Every victory he gains over corrupt nature, every vice he subdues, every passion he masters, is, as St. Augustine observes, a step that raises him to a higher degree of perfection, and brings him nearer to the kingdom of Heaven; it entitles him to an increase of God's grace in this life, and to an eternal reward in the next. This made Thomas of Kempis say, that it is more noble and more glorious for a Christian to conquer himself, and to subdue his passions, than to subdue kingdoms and empires. This also made Origen formerly say, that a Christian who rules and commands his passions is a king; his kingdom is within himself, and there he enjoys every thing he wishes and desires. All this plainly shows the utility as well as the necessity of restraining the depraved inclinations of nature, and subduing our disorderly passions. But what are the most effectual means to succeed herein? It is what I promised to lay before you in the second point.

The great Author of Nature has given us several different feelings and natural dispositions, for wise and salutary purposes. He intended that we should form these feelings to virtue, and render them instrumental to our eternal salvation, by directing them to their proper objects; but, alas! in the present state of corrupted nature they are generally turned into vices, degenerate into disorderly passions, and are made subservient to numberless sins. Amongst the various passions that men are subject to, there is one passion in particular that commands the rest, and sets them all in motion; this passion is called the predominant or prevailing passion, because it is more strong and more lively, more violent, and more imperious than the rest; it is it that usually forms a man's character, disposition, and the complexion of his temper. It is apt to exercise a kind of tyrannical dominion over the sinner, and, like a weight, draws his heart away from the love of God to the love of some created object, unless he takes care to correct it, and to subject it to the spirit. It must be acknowledged that this is a work attended with no small difficulty, especially in the beginning; however, let the passions be ever so inveterate, ever so obstinate, ever so perverse in their nature, we have it in our power to deliver ourselves from their captivity, and bring them under proper subjection, with the assistance of God's grace; for, as St. Paul says (Philip. iv.), *I can do all things in Him who strengthens me; not I, but the grace of God with me.* That our endeavors may be crowned with success, we are to begin with taking a close view of the state of our souls, the first step toward a virtuous life being a true knowledge of ourselves. We are to examine carefully what particular vice influences our actions most, what sinful habit has the greatest empire and ascendancy over us; for the predominant passion, or prevailing vice is different in different persons, according to the difference of their humors and natural dispositions. In some the predominant passion is an overbearing pride, and an insolent haughtiness; in others it is an insatiable avarice. In some it is a restless ambition; in others a brutal lasciviousness. In some a criminal excess and intemperance in eating and drinking; in others an implacable hatred, anger, and desire of revenge, or some other disorderly passion. When a person has once discovered the particular nature of his predominant passion and favorite vice, he ought to lay the ax to the root of it, and labor in good earnest to destroy sin from its very foundation; he ought to cut off the source that feeds and nourishes his passions; for it is vain for him to pretend to stop and purify the current, whilst the source is let to run, and continues foul and

corrupted ; in short, he ought above all things to rectify his interior, and purify his heart, by eradicating inordinate self-love to the utmost of his power, and by laying a deep foundation of humility. Take away self-love and self-will, says St. Bernard, and you will shut up all the avenues of hell. No evil is more pernicious or more to be dreaded, than self-love, on account of its strong attachment to sensual objects ; it is the greatest enemy of our souls, and the poisonous source of all our vices ; it is the root from whence all evil thoughts, all evil desires, and all the passions do spring. *Concupiscence of the flesh, concupiscence of the eyes, and pride of life*, as St. John calls it, nay, all the seven capital sins, are but so many different branches of self-love. It is planted in the heart of man, and ingrafted, as it were, on human nature since the fall of our first parents ; it is there, of course, that self-denial and mortification should strike the first blow.

The passions may be combatted, then, with some prospect of success, not altogether, but separately, one after the other, it being much easier to conquer and defeat an enemy when his forces are divided than when they are united, according to the old axiom, *Divide and conquer*. The predominant passion is the first that should be encountered, for if it once gives way there is reason to hope, with the blessing of God, that the whole superstructure and fabric of iniquity will soon fall to the ground ; it is, as it were, the champion and commander of all the other passions ; consequently, when it is once overthrown and brought under subjection, the rest of the passions may be easily vanquished and subdued, as the Philistines were readily conquered and put to flight when Goliath their champion was slain ; or as all the other cities and inferior towns of a kingdom are readily compelled to surrender, when the capital and strongest city is captured and reduced to obedience ; but if the predominant passion be spared and indulged in the heart, little or no success will attend our endeavors to subdue the other subordinate passions, which are supported by it ; any attempt we may happen to make for this purpose will, according to the comparison of St. Augustine, only resemble the feeble efforts of a man who would pretend to dry up a torrent of water, without stopping the source that constantly supplies it ; or who would take upon him to clear a piece of ground by lopping off the branches of a tree, and leaving the trunk and root in the ground to shoot up again.

This accounts for the constant falls and manifest inconsistencies of so many Christians, who continue always the same fickle and relapsing sin-

ners, ever promising and resolving, but never performing or executing. Like unhappy Saul, who slew the subjects and spared Agag, their king, they spare their predominant passion, which replunges them into their former extravagancies ; they refuse to sacrifice that disguised pride, that vain-glory, that avarice, that ambition, that lechery, that envy, that vicious self-love, which reigns and domineers in their hearts. They make, indeed, at times, a few weak efforts to subdue some of their passions, but they do not begin at the source ; they do not purify the spring ; they do not remove the principal cause of their spiritual disorders ; they unfortunately indulge their favorite vice, and cherish their predominant and darling passion. They will readily perform what belongs to the exterior of religion, but they will not be prevailed on to pardon an injury, to bear an offense, or to put up with an affront. They have courage enough to fast, to abstain, and to multiply the outward exercises of piety and devotion, but at the same time they overlook and neglect their interior. They pay little or no attention to the spiritual mortification of their own will and criminal affections. It is true, the exterior mortification of the body, and the outward practices of religion, are powerful helps and necessary means to expiate sin, to subdue the passions, and to attain to the inward mortification of the spirit, and therefore they should not be neglected ; but the spiritual mortification of the interior should be chiefly attended to, as it is more meritorious, more essential, and more indispensably necessary,

God requires to be worshipped in spirit and truth, interiorly as well as exteriorly. The heart and interior is what He principally regards ; if it be vicious, unmortified, and infected with the poison of pride and self-love, we may fast, we may pray, we may mortify the flesh as much as the ancient hermits and recluses have done in the desert ; our fasts, our abstinences, our long prayers and corporal mortifications, will turn to no account ; they will remain without merit, without reward, unless they are accompanied with the inward mortification of the spirit, and rectified by a pure intention ; they will find no acceptance with God, but will be despised and rejected by Him, as the Prophet Isaias tells us, (c. lviii.), the outward offerings and sacrifices of the Jews were formerly despised and rejected, on account of their unmortified spirit. Hence St. Jerome says (Ep. ad Cel.) : It will avail you nothing to emaciate your body with fasting, if your mind be puffed up with pride ; it will profit you nothing to be pale with abstinence, if, under this fair outside and appearance of virtue, your heart be black and blue with

envy and malice. Those very actions which the world admires most, and which appear most brilliant in the eyes of men, will be deemed in the eyes of God no better than false and pharisaical virtues, if the intention and motive with which they are performed be nothing but vain-glory, ostentation and human respect.

Unless, therefore, my brethren, we have a mind to run the risk of finding our hands empty at the last day, and of losing the fruits of all our labors for ever, we must above all things take care to cultivate our interior, to regulate all the motions of our hearts, and to beware of being influenced and actuated in our proceedings by any sinister views or improper motives. The passions and vices which we wish to conquer and subdue, are to be counteracted and controlled by frequent acts of the different virtues, which are directly opposite and contrary to them ; for example, we are to oppose acts of humility to pride, acts of liberality to covetousness, acts of patience to anger, acts of fraternal charity to envy. Every thing that is apt to inflame the passions and to excite them to revolt, ought to be shunned, though it should happen to be as dear to a person as the very apple of his eye. The outward senses require also to be watched and guarded. It was by the lust of the senses that sin first entered into the world ; they are the organs and instruments whereby the passions are frequently awakened and roused, when otherwise they would lie dormant like fire under the ashes ; they are the inlets, avenues and windows of the soul, by which sin usually breaks in and makes its way to the soul, when they are not carefully guarded and protected. Besides these precautions, it is necessary to direct the passions to their proper objects ; for example, that love which is blindly bestowed on the creature should be directed to the Creator ; that hatred which is conceived against an enemy, should be leveled against our sins, which are our greatest enemies ; they should be made the object of our grief, of our sorrow, and of our tears. Instead of being afflicted for the loss of temporal goods, we should change the object and bewail the loss of God's grace. Instead of fearing the frowns, menaces and unmerited censures of men, we should above all things dread the terrible judgments of God. Instead of coveting the perishable riches of this transitory life, we should thirst after the spiritual riches of eternal glory. An habitual sense of the divine presence, devout meditation on the sacred passion of our Divine Redeemer, frequent recourse to the holy sacraments and fountains of grace, a daily examination of conscience, not only in general, but in particular, with

regard to the predominant passion and customary vices that are to be conquered ; in fine, humble and fervent prayers are likewise recommended by spiritual writers, as so many powerful means to succeed in the conquest of the passions, and gain a complete victory over all the enemies of the soul. Excite in us, O Lord, a spirit of Christian mortification, and enable us to crucify the flesh with its vices and concupiscences. Thou formerly didst deliver the children of Israel from the bondage of Egypt ; deliver us, we beseech Thee, from the tyrannical empire of self-love, and from the slavery of those predominant passions which lead so many souls astray, and draw them from the pursuit of virtue. Give us grace to resist all the solicitations of this sinful Babylon, and to restrain all the impetuosities of flesh and blood. O may the fire of Thy divine love inflame our hearts, and inspire us with courage and zeal to combat successfully for that never-fading crown of glory which is prepared in the kingdom of Heaven for those who conquer. And which I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

ON THE RIGOR AND DURATION OF THE PAINS OF HELL.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

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| I. Frightful condition of the damned. | IV. The three consequences of sin. |
| II. The punishments of damned souls. | V. The sufferings of this world. |
| III. Strong appeal to Christians. | VI. The terrifying truths of eternity. |
| VII. Peroration | |

Colligite zizania et alligate ea in fasciculos ad comburendum. — Matt. c. xiii. v. 30.
Gather the tares together, and bind them into bundles to burn. — Matt. c. xiii. v. 30.

OUR Divine Redeemer, in the Gospel of this day, compares the kingdom of Heaven, or His Church here on earth, to a field sowed with good seed and producing good wheat, but intermixed with pernicious tares and weeds until the harvest time, when the good grain is separated from the bad, and lodged in the husbandman's barn, and the tares and weeds are bound up into bundles, and cast into the fire to burn. St.

Augustine brings down this parable to prove against the Novatians and Donatists, that in the Church of Jesus Christ there will be always good and bad, just and unjust, vessels of election and children of perdition, intermixed together, until the end of the world and the day of judgment, when the dreadful separation is to take place, and the just and faithful servants of God, like unto a rich crop, are to be carried by the angels into the mansions of eternal bliss ; and on the contrary the wicked, like unto noxious weeds and tares bound up into bundles at the harvest-time, shall be gathered together and thrown into the fire of hell, to burn for ever. Such, alas ! is to be the sad fate of sinners, who, being graciously called to the inheritance of the kingdom of Heaven, render themselves unworthy of so great a blessing by the immortality of their lives. Such is the unhappy lot of those wicked Christians who abandon themselves to vice, and who neglect the practice of virtue ; who lead a life openly criminal and irregular, and who lead a life altogether unprofitable and barren in good works. They shall be cast into exterior darkness, and for ever deprived of the light of glory and the sight of God. They shall be plunged into an abyss of perpetual night, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth ; where they shall suffer the most excruciating torments for millions of years, and when these are past, for as many millions more. Their misery will always begin, but never end ; it will be as lasting as an eternity. May the Lord, of His infinite goodness, preserve every one here present from an experimental knowledge of these terrifying truths, and from being condemned to such insupportable torments. Alas ! my brethren, would not the greatest part of us all be involved in this misfortune, if God had not hitherto spared us ? Would we not be confined now in the burning prisons of hell, had He immediately inflicted on us the just punishment due to our sins the very instant we presumed to offend Him ? Thanks to His boundless mercy, the arrest of our condemnation is still suspended for some time, and we have it yet in our power to escape so rigorous a sentence by means of a sincere conversion. Let us profit of so great a favor, and for this end let us enter in spirit into those fiery furnaces, and consider attentively what the reprobate suffer there. The rigorous torments which the damned endure in hell, and the duration of these torments, shall be the two points of this discourse. The rigorous torments of hell shall be the first point ; the duration of these torments shall be the second point, and the whole subject of your favorable attention. Let us previously implore the assistance of Heaven, through the

intercession of the Blessed Mother of Jesus, greeting her with the Angel, *Ave Maria*.

The Royal Prophet, in his words of the forty-fourth psalm, exhorts us to descend in thought into hell, whilst we live ; and St. Bernard, in his exposition of this psalm, gives the following reason for it, that a frequent meditation on this frightful mansion of the reprobate, may prevent us falling into it after our death. Holy Job practiced this lesson, when he said (c. vii.): Hell is my place of abode, and I have made for myself a bed in this abyss of darkness. Let us then, my brethren, approach this mansion of horror and misery ; let us enter into it, if possible, with the same sentiments which the damned now have of its insupportable torments. But, alas ! who can comprehend, says St. Augustine, what a damned soul comprehends ? Who can form, by the most profound meditation, the same idea which it has of its present unhappy state in the midst of hell's devouring flames ? Let us at least endeavor to form to ourselves such an idea as will convince us *how horrible it is to fall into the hands of the living God*, as St. Paul speaks in his epistle to the Hebrews (c. x.), O how unhappy and deplorable is the condition of a soul in this state of reprobation ? It sees it has lost God, and is condemned as an unhappy victim to unquenchable fire. It has lost God ! O shocking and irreparable loss ? Who can comprehend it ? To give you a just notion of it, it would be necessary to represent to you what a happiness it is to possess God, and to make you understand what He is in Himself, that you might conceive how great are the pleasures, raptures and ecstasies, which attend the enjoyment of Him. But if the great St. Paul, though rapt up to the third heaven, tells us that the eye has not seen, the ear has not heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man, to conceive the unspeakable joys which God has prepared in heaven for His chosen servants, you are not to expect that I can give you an adequate idea of this supreme felicity. To be sensible, however, of the unspeakable misery which is the result of being deprived of the inexpressible happiness of possessing God, we need but consider that God is a being infinite in every perfection ; in Him is concentrated all that is amiable, all that is estimable. He is an immense ocean of all delights, of all pleasure, of all joy, of all content. Judge, then, how unhappy and how deplorable the condition of the reprobate souls must be, when they see themselves deprived of this supreme good, of this unspeakable happiness, through their own fault. If they still exist, existence is to them but an additional torment, as they only retain it to

make them eternally sensible that they have lost their God, and in losing Him they have lost all the goods of nature, all the goods of grace, and all the goods of glory. To be reduced to their primitive nothing would be to them far more pleasing than to live only to be thus overwhelmed with a deluge of misery, and to be made eternally sensible of the inexpressible loss they have suffered, in having lost their God and sovereign good.

But this is not the only punishment of the damned souls. Sensible torments, the most violent, the most intense, and the most acute, increase their pains beyond expression. We have a frightful idea given us of those torments in the sentence which Jesus Christ will pronounce on the day of the general judgment against the reprobate; *Begone from me, ye accursed, into eternal fire.* Is there any torture so dreadful in itself as to be burnt alive with a raging fire? We have often heard of a fire raging with such violence as to reduce great buildings in a few hours to a heap of ashes. What are the endeavors of a distressed family in such circumstances to escape the fury of the flames? What sighs, what clamors, what piteous lamentations? What violent efforts, what trouble, what despair? If any one happens by a melancholy accident to be surprised on a sudden, and to be burnt alive, does not the bare recital hereof make us tremble? When we read of some of the holy martyrs being cast into cauldrons of boiling oil, or extended on glowing gridirons and burning coals, do we not shudder at the very thoughts hereof? If the picture be so frightful and terrifying, what must the real torment be? Fire is the most rigorous punishment that human justice can inflict for the most atrocious crimes, and when the Almighty resolved to extirpate the infamous inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrha, He caused showers of fire to descend from heaven on these unfortunate cities. But this fire was only a slight prelude of the eternal flames of hell, every other fire being no more than a painted fire in comparison of it, as St. Augustine speaks.

We read in the lives of the ancient recluses, of a certain holy religious man, that, whenever he was tempted to sin, he was accustomed to touch fire with his finger, and finding himself obliged to withdraw it instantly, he said to himself, if for a moment I cannot bear this transitory pain in my finger, how could I endure for all eternity the flames of hell fire, penetrating my very soul, and torturing every part of my whole body? This thought touched him. It excited his zeal and animated his fervor. He had it constantly present in his mind, and it was enough to

sweeten all the rigors of solitude, all the austerities of the cloister, and to make him resist every temptation of the devil, the world, and the flesh. Abstinence, fasting, maceration of the body, retreat, silence, long prayers, painful and fatiguing exercises of penance and devotion seemed no longer difficult to him.

Are ye not, my brethren, threatened with the same fire? Have you not more reason to fear it than this faithful servant of God? You, who are so much alarmed at the misfortunes and sufferings of this life, that you constantly endeavor to prevent them, and still you labor so little to escape the sufferings of the next life? You, who are slaves to your passions, who pamper a body that must soon return to dust and ashes, and who indulge yourselves in all that is pleasing to sense, and agreeable to your inclinations? You, who are deluded by the world, and its fawning pleasures and deceitful charms, who pass your days unprofitably in a round of frivolous amusements, without bestowing a serious reflection on the important affair of your salvation? The present time wholly engages your attention, and you think not of the dreadful time to come. O what excuse will you plead when the fatal moment of death arrives, and when you are summoned to appear before the bar of divine justice? When God will pronounce sentence of condemnation against impenitent sinners, and confine them within the deep dungeons and burning prisons of hell, which of you will be able to dwell in such a painful habitation? Who among you, cries out the Prophet Isaias (c. xxxiii.), will be able to endure everlasting burning? Will it be those men of pleasure, who allow themselves every liberty that a sensual appetite can desire? Will it be those women of fashion, who are of so delicate a constitution that they cannot at present undergo the least mortification? A light fit of sickness seems now to them insupportable. To speak to them of the observance of the fast days commanded by the Church is, if you believe themselves, to demand a thing impossible. To impose on them a necessary penance for the expiation of their sins and the subduing of their passions is to load them with too heavy a burden. To deprive them of some idle amusements, to lay them under some little restraint on certain occasions, is to make life quite disagreeable to them. They are not made to such practices. They are above their strength. Their delicacy, their weakness, is such that they say they are not able to bear so heavy a load. But, my brethren, this delicacy, this weakness, to which you listen so much when it is necessary to give sanction to your indolence and sloth, or to apologize for your neglect of duty,

and your impatience in sufferings ; this same delicacy, why do you not consult it when you expose yourselves to the danger of falling into the flames of hell ? Those furnaces, those lakes, those pools, those gulfs of liquid fire—have they nothing dreadful, nothing frightful to deter you from falling into them ?

Descend, I beseech you, in thought, into those abysses, which perhaps God will soon open under your feet, to plunge you into them, unless you repent speedily. Descend, then, beforehand, and examine, what you will find there ? . You will find monsters of impiety and irreligion. You will find crowds of cursers, swearers and blasphemers. You will find lechers, adulterers, and fornicators ; drunkards, detractors, extortioners, and a multitude of other impenitent sinners like unto you. You are now, perhaps, what they have been, whilst they were here on earth, and unless you reform your lives, you will be one day what they now are in that frightful prison, into which their final impenitence has unhappily led them.

Descend again in thought into those abysses, and what will you find there ? An unquenchable fire, which, as the Prophet Isaias speaks (c. xxx.), the breath of God has kindled to punish the reprobate. You will find there a fire, which, though terrible in its own nature, is far more dreadful, as it is in the hand of God the instrument of His formidable vengeance ; for His all-powerful hand elevates it above its natural force and activity, and communicates to it a miraculous virtue, by which it can effect and penetrate the souls as well as the bodies of the reprobate, in the most painful and sensible manner, and that without consuming them. Ah ! sinners, have you ever comprehended what it is to have the whole force of the all-powerful hand of God against you ? His supreme power is without limits. It passes all the bounds of nature, and from this truth what frightful consequences are to be drawn ?

They are these. First, that the fire of hell is infinitely more active than the common fire, which we have here on earth. Yes, my brethren, Mount Etna, Mount Vesuvius, and those other sulphurous mountains and volcanos, which belch forth torrents of liquid flame, and spread terror and desolation all over the neighboring plains ; that burning rain which fell from heaven on Sodom and Ghomorrha, and reduced that populous country into a heap of ashes ; the furnace of Babylon, whose flames mounted forty cubits high ; all these, says St. Bernard, are but

as small sparks of that most dreadful fire which God has prepared in His wrath to punish the reprobate in hell.

The second consequence is, that the fire of hell, for its rigor, is far above all the torments that we can suffer in this world. Let your imagination represent to you all that is terrifying. Assemble in your mind all that the cruelty of tyrants has invented, and all that the patience of martyrs has been able to endure ; that is to say, form to yourselves an idea of pains the most acute, of punishments the most sensible and lingering, of tortures the most violent and racking, and all kinds of death more cruel than any human tongue can express ; all these deserve not the name of torments, if compared to the devouring fire of hell ; so that could the same man, at the same time, suffer these various tortures, his sufferings, as St. Augustine says, would be as nothing, if compared to the sufferings of a damned soul—*non parva sed nulla*. And why so? The reason is obvious, because all the sufferings of this life, however violent they may be, are but the effects of natural causes, which have a limited force and virtue ; but in this infernal fire it is the all-powerful arm of God that discharges the whole weight of its vengeance on the reprobate ; so that their punishment must be as dreadful as His power is infinite.

The third and last consequence is, that all the transitory evils which affect us in this life, are, to speak in the scripture language, but as some small drops of that deluge of misery with which the damned are overwhelmed in hell—Dan. ix. They are but light strokes of Divine justice, the present time being a time of grace and mercy. What then must it be, when God will chastise sinners in His fury? If one drop, says St. Jerome, makes so sensible an impression, what must it be when whole showers of His rage will fall upon them? What must it be when His fury will break out as an impetuous torrent, or as a rapid river which overflows its banks, and carries terror and desolation with it on every side? It is then you will learn, O sinners, by woeful experience, what it is to exhaust the bounty of God, to abuse His mercy, to resist His graces, to reject His calls, and to tire His patience. At present His mercy withholds the thunderbolts of His indignation, but then His justice will cry out for vengeance ; it will convince you that He is a God who knows how to punish rebellious and impenitent sinners at a proper time, and that as He rewards the good in heaven with a boundless liberality, so He will punish the reprobate in hell with the utmost rigor, and inflict torments without mercy. We have now con-

sidered the rigor of the torments of hell. Let us briefly consider their duration.

All our sufferings in this world have this peculiar to them, that they are one day to have an end, and this affords us some consolation even in the midst of our most violent pains ; but in hell the torments are rigorous beyond what we can comprehend or imagine ; and what makes them still more insupportable is, that they are to be everlasting. O unfortunate sinners, who now make so little account of the zealous efforts of the preachers of the Gospel, when they endeavor to give you an idea of the pains of hell, the time will come when you will be convinced that all they have said, or could say, is but a faint representation of what these pains are in reality. You will then be overwhelmed with grief, to find that He who will drive you from His presence, is that same God who, during the course of your life, had nothing but bowels of mercy and compassion for you. You will then be covered with shame and confusion to find that your Divine Redeemer, who spilt His blood and gave His life for your salvation, will then have nothing but thunderbolts in His hands to punish your crying sins. You will then foam with rage, and cry out with regret, O transitory pleasures ! O base voluptuousness ! O perishable riches ! You cost me very dear ! Must I for you be banished from heaven ? be rejected and hated by my Creator, and forfeit my right to an everlasting inheritance ? Must I, for a vain momentary satisfaction, be for ever deprived of the enjoyment of my God, and eternally excluded from the joys and delights of Paradise, and from the amiable company of the blessed Angels and Saints ? O what has my pride, what has my vanity, what have all my past pleasures and worldly enjoyments availed me ? Such, alas ! are the doleful lamentations of the damned ; such are the fatal consequences of violating the sacred laws, and transgressing the commandments of the Lord ; such are the dire effects of yielding to the deadly sins of pride, covetousness, lechery, anger, gluttony, envy, and sloth ! O mortal sin, how frightful must thou be, since the unhappy offenders are to dwell in a lake of flames, in the midst of a devouring fire, and that without resource, without the least consolation, without the least mitigation of their pains ! O, my brethren, if twenty-four hours of a violent gravel, gout, toothache, or headache, seem so long and tedious, what must it be to burn in flames of fire with legions of merciless devils, and to burn eternally ? Reflect seriously on this, ye who give full scope to your passions, and live without restraint, without

faith, without religion. Consider how deplorable must the condition of the damned be, who, filled with the idea of eternity, are ascertained that after burning a hundred years in the mansion of misery, they must still burn a hundred more, and when the second century is ended they must begin a third, a fourth, a fifth, and a sixth, and so on without ever stopping. Nay, after ten thousand years, a hundred thousand years, a hundred thousand millions of years have passed over a hundred thousand millions of times, the fire of hell will be still as violent, their souls and bodies will be still as sensible of the pains, and God will be still as incensed and as irreconcilable as at the beginning, and at the very first instant of their damnation.

You are seized with horror when you are told that a bird, which only once in a thousand years would carry away one single drop of sea water, or an atom of earth, would drain up the ocean, and level all the mountains of the universe, before the punishment of the damned would be at an end ; but I tell you now, that their punishment at the expiration of this immense term of years will be still as if it had only begun that instant ; I tell you, moreover, that as many hundred thousand millions of years would pass away as there are moments in a hundred thousand millions of ages ; and that as many seas would be drained as there are drops of water in the ocean, and as many mountains would be leveled in the aforesaid manner, as there are atoms in the air, stars in the firmament, sands in the sea, and creatures in the universe, before the duration of the punishment of the damned would be abridged, or in the least diminished ; nay, such a prodigious number of years and ages, compared to eternity, would not be even one week, one day, one hour. It would, says St. Augustine, be as nothing at all. If, after such an immense space of time, an angel descended into hell to assure the damned, on the part of God, that they only had as many millions of ages to suffer, as they had suffered moments till that present juncture, hell would be no longer hell, and nothing would be heard in it but praises, blessings, and acts of thanksgiving. But, alas ! they are well assured that they never are to hear of their deliverance, never of any peace, never of any truce, never of any reconciliation ; no term, no end, no hopes of an end. They must burn as long as the saints will be happy, as long as God will be immutable, as long as God will be God, without the least prospect of ever having any other habitation but a fiery dungeon, any other bed but a bed of fire, any other air to breathe.

but sulphur or scorching flames, or any other company but legions of infernal furies.

It was this terrifying truth that made St. Augustine cry out, in his Book of Soliloquies: "O Eternity! Eternity! Eternity! He that reflects attentively on thy duration, and does not repent and reform his life, must be void of faith; or if he still retains a superficial and languishing faith, he certainly acts as if he were destitute of reason, sense, and understanding." The very saints themselves were so deeply penetrated, and so sensibly affected with the thoughts of this incomprehensible mystery, that they spent their days in the severest exercises of penance and mortification; they judged no labor too difficult, no austerity too great, no penance too rigorous, whereby an eternity of misery might be prevented, and an eternity of bliss acquired. King David tells us, that he made eternity the subject of his most profound reflections. The great St. Jerome was so terrified at the thoughts of eternity, that he ceased not, like the humble publican in the Gospel, to strike his breast with compunction, and to call on Heaven for mercy. It was a lively apprehension of eternity that formerly peopled the deserts with anchorites, and drew so many thousands into solitudes and caverns, remote from human society, where they macerated their flesh, and practiced all the rigors of a penitential life. To conclude, then, my brethren, let me exhort you to make eternity the subject of your serious meditation; descend frequently in thought into hell whilst you are alive, that you may not descend into it when you are dead. Let that raging fire extinguish in your hearts the fire of concupiscence, and kindle in them the fire of divine charity. O what will it avail you to gratify your passions, to indulge your senses, to wallow in filthy pleasures, nay, even to gain the whole universe, if at your dying hour the gates of heaven be shut in your face, and your soul be plunged into hell fire? If there be any sinners in this congregation whose conscience flies in their face, and tells them that they are involved in the dismal state or habit of mortal sin, let me conjure them by the bowels of Jesus Christ, to sleep no longer in the arms of perdition, to remain no longer on the brink of hell, to expose themselves no longer to the imminent danger of eternal damnation. Let me entreat them to arise speedily out of the mire of iniquity, and throw themselves with confidence at the feet of God's mercy. Let me beseech them to repent of their sins in time, that they may not have reason to repent in vain for a never-ending eternity. Let me entreat them to renounce those odious vices and

detestable habits which render them a disgrace to religion, and a reproach to Christianity.

O sweetest Jesus, inspire us all with a feeling sense of these important truths ; be thou a Jesus to us, and save our miserable souls. Let not the fruits and merits of Thy sacred Passion be lost on us, but bring us to the happy end for which we have been created and ransomed with Thy precious blood. Thou art the Lamb of God who takest away the sins of the world ; take from us whatever is displeasing to Thee, and give us whatever is conducive to our eternal happiness. Grant that we may treasure up a provision of good works for a blessed eternity, and that we may be found worthy on the last day to be admitted into those sacred mansions of bliss which Thou hast purchased for us at the expense of Thy life. And which I heartily wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

ON THE NATURE OF A TRUE AND PERFECT REPENTANCE.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

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| I. The mustard seed and the kingdom
of Heaven | III. Ahab. |
| II. The heart the source of virtue. | IV. Oh ! the consequences of sin. |
| | V. The happy times of the Church. |
| VI. Peroration. | |

Simile est Regnum Cœlorum grano Sinapis. — St. Matt. c. xiii v. 31.

The kingdom of Heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed. — St. Matt. c. xiii. v. 31.

By the Kingdom of Heaven, mentioned in the Gospel of this day, is generally understood the Spiritual Kingdom, or Church of Jesus Christ and His heavenly doctrine, of which a grain of mustard seed is said to bear some resemblance ; for as the mustard seed, though one of the smallest grains before it is sowed, yet when it is sowed and takes root in the earth grows to a considerable height, especially in hot climates, such as Syria and Palestine, and becomes a large tree with such extensive branches, that they serve as a retreat for *the birds of the air*, as the Gospel expresses it, so, in like manner, the Church of Christ,

though small and inconsiderable in its origin, and confined to a corner of Judea in the beginning, made so stupenduous a progress in a short time, and grew into so lofty and large a tree, that it extended its branches all over the known world, and that the birds of the air, that is, the sovereigns and potentates of the earth, took shelter under it, and subjected themselves to its direction. It spread itself with amazing success from East to West, and in a few years comprehended within its pale those very nations, tribes, and people who at first opposed it with all their power. Thus was verified the prediction of the Royal Prophet in his second Psalm, v. 8., where he introduces the Eternal Father, speaking of Christ and His Church, and saying, *I will give thee the nations for thy inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.* Christ Himself is the Supreme Head of the Church, and all the faithful are His members, and form one mystical body, linked together and animated by one and the same spirit. He governs and protects His Church with the most endearing attention, meekness, and sweetness, and abundantly supplies it with all necessities for its welfare. *He that loves his Church,* says St. Paul (Ephes. v. 25, 26,) *and delivered himself up for it, that he might sanctify it, cleansing it by laver of water, in the word of life.* It is by His merits that our souls are cleansed from original sin in the Sacrament of Baptism, and from the actual sins that are afterward committed, provided we sincerely repent of them, and have recourse to His mercy with the necessary dispositions. This is what the Apostle zealously exhorts all sinners to (Acts iii. 19,) where he says, *Be penitent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.* But the great misfortune of the sinner is, as St. John Chrysostom observes, that he can never be absolutely assured in this life of the validity of his repentance, although he is well assured of the reality of his sins, and that repentance is absolutely necessary to blot them out. What renders his condition truly deplorable is, that often his very repentance itself should be no less a subject of anxiety to him than his sins, because it is only a true and sincere repentance that can save the sinner; and on the other hand, there are a thousand other repentances either false or vain, imperfect, or insincere, and insufficient for salvation. If then the sinner happens to be deceived; if, for want of proper discernment, he mistakes a false repentance for a true one; if he counts on that as sufficient, which is really defective, from that moment he may be ranked amongst the most unfortunate of sinners, because his very repentance, which should be the

means of his justification, becomes, by a sacrilegious abuse of a sacrament, one of the causes of his ruin and perdition. This, my brethren, is what our holy religion teaches, and what should make every sinner tremble. My present design, therefore, is to instruct you in this essential duty, and to lay before you the nature of a true and perfect repentance. It is a true sorrow of the heart which hates, detests, and destroys sin, and moves the sinner to satisfy the justice of the offended Deity. To be truly penit^{ent} you must then have a true sorrow of heart, and you must endeavor to satisfy God's justice by works of penance and mortification; in short, the necessity of a true sorrow of heart and the necessity of penitential works. These are the two points of this discourse, and the entire subject of your favorable attention. Let us previously invoke the light of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, &c. *Ave Maria.*

The heart, says St. John Chrysostom, is the first source of virtue, and of vice; it is in it all sins are formed, and have their birth and subsistence. From it come forth evil thoughts, thefts, murders, and adulteries, as our Blessed Saviour speaks—Matt. c. xv. It is the heart that makes the eyes subservient to impurity, the ears to detraction, the tongue to slander and blasphemy, and the hands to dishonesty, injustice, and cruelty. All the senses, all the faculties of the body are but servile instruments, that only act as influenced, directed, and governed by the heart, according to its own perverse inclinations. This being supposed, since the heart is the first and principal criminal, and the first that feels the sordid pleasure of sin, it is most just, as Tertullian says, that it should be first punished, and the first to feel a bitter sorrow and sincere regret for having consented to sin, with a firm resolution to sin no more. It must hate and detest sin above all things; not precisely because it is odious and detestable in itself, but because it is an offense of God, and a violation of His sacred law. This detestation, this grief, this regret, must necessarily be lodged in the heart of the penitent sinner; without it every other kind of repentance is vain, unprofitable, and insufficient to root up and destroy sin; for sin being a voluntary preference of the creature before the Creator, or a free choice, and an inordinate love formed in the heart of the sinner, by which he loves some fleeting good, some perishable object, preferably to his last end and supreme happiness, it is only by an opposite hatred, formed in the heart, that sin can be totally vanquished and destroyed. Hence the Almighty demands of us, by the Prophet Joel, a heart torn with grief and sor-

row, as the only sacrifice capable to appease His wrath and indignation. *Be converted to me*, (says the Lord, Joel ii. 12), *in fasting, and in weeping, and in mourning, and rend your hearts and not your garments.* And again, *Be converted to me with all your heart.*

Although you should then, my brethren, strike your breasts a thousand times ; though you should raise your hands to Heaven, and deliver yourselves in the most moving, most pathetic terms, to implore the divine mercy ; though the air should echo with your sighs ; though rivulets of tears should flow from your eyes, if the body only be in a state of humiliation, if the mouth only speaks, if the eyes only weep, and the heart still remains silent, still unmoved, still obdurate, your repentance is vain and unprofitable, and it will never move God to look down on you with a favorable eye of mercy. The first victim He demands of you is the heart, a heart truly penitent and contrite, pierced with a bitter sorrow for having offended Him. It is true, sighs, tears, exterior acts of contrition, humiliations of the body, and the like outward performances, are sometimes the effects and marks of a true inward sorrow of the heart, but not always ; for it is certain that they are consistent with a heart wholly unchanged, and often subsists with a secret and criminal attachment to sin, since they frequently have nothing but mere self-love, servile fear, and motives purely human and natural for their foundation. A lively apprehension, a violent fear, a tenderness of complexion, may naturally force tears and sighs from a person, without working any conversion in the heart, as appears in the unfortunate Antiochus, who, as we read in the second book of Machabees, implored the divine mercy with many tears, and gave all the outward marks of sincere repentance, though at the same time the Lord, who is the searcher of hearts, saw no real conversion or change in his heart ; for had his heart been truly changed and converted, he would undoubtedly have obtained the mercy he prayed for, and which, as the Scripture assures us, he never obtained.

Who could seem more penitent than Achab, the wicked King of Israel ? He tore his royal garments asunder in sign of repentance ; he mortified his flesh, he fasted, he slept on ashes and sackcloth, he was not ashamed to appear before his subjects in this state of debasement, he was willing his penance should be as public as were his crimes ; notwithstanding, because the unfortunate prince, in all his outward mortifications, had more at heart his own private interest than the interest of his God, whom he had so grievously offended, his repentance was

rejected by Heaven, though the execution of the sentence pronounced against him was suspended until the time of his death, on account of his having assumed the exterior of a penitent. Be no longer deceived, then, my brethren, in a matter of such importance ; a mere outward lip repentance is not sufficient to blot out your sins ; as long as you cherish a real affection for them in your heart you will not, you cannot be forgiven.

You, therefore, who have the misfortune to be grievous sinners like Ahab, and but counterfeit penitents, have every reason to fear the just but formidable judgments of Heaven. If your God is silent at present, if He seems to overlook your heinous crimes, and to suspend the execution of the dreadful sentence He has already pronounced against blasphemers, detractors, fornicators, and drunkards, it is perhaps to punish you with greater rigor at your dying hour. Do not imagine, then, that a superficial repentance, or a historical detail of your sins at the sacred tribunal of confession, or a few exterior practices of piety and exercises of religion, will screen you from sharing in the eternal punishment of the reprobate hereafter. If you sincerely wish to appease the indignation of Heaven, and to cancel and efface your crimes in the sight of God, you must be penetrated with a true penitential sorrow, which is incompatible with an attachment to vice ; you must have a supernatural sorrow that will banish the love of sin ; you must have a sincere interior sorrow in your heart for having offended God, with a fixed and determined resolution to offend Him no more.

In effect, my brethren, what should you grieve for if you grieve not for having offended so good a God, by transgressing His commandments ? The loss of your innocence, the death of your soul, the enmity of your Creator, the precious blood of your Divine Redeemer profaned, the glory of Heaven forfeited, a hell prepared for all your crimes ; all these moving and affecting objects assembled in your mind, shall they be incapable to make an impression on your hearts ? Did you but meditate attentively on these two words, *Peccavi Domino*, which King David formerly said to the Prophet Nathan, and which since have often pierced the hearts of many other true penitents, *I have sinned against the Lord*, your hearts would also be touched with compunction, and you would be excited to weep night and day for your sins as they did. What ! my brethren, *Peccavi Domino*, I have sinned against the Lord, I have rebelled against my God, I have offended my most bountiful Benefactor, I have trampled on His sacred laws, I have repaid all

His favors with the blackest ingratitude, I have broken through all the ties by which I was united to Him. He is my Creator, and I have unhappily forgotten that I am His creature. I was His child, and I have disowned Him for a father. He has been my Saviour, He has died for me on a cross, and I have without remorse recrucified Him. Prevented by His graces, loaded with His favors, I have only made use of all His blessings only to offend Him—I have only made them serve to the ruin and damnation of my soul. Were these reflections duly present to your mind, you would cry out with heartfelt grief, O what evil deserves our tears, but sin? O what should make us weep and lament, if it be not sin? Sin, base and detestable sin, that disfigures the soul, and changes its beauty into loathsome deformity; sin, that degrades man, who was but *little inferior to the Angels*, as the Scripture says, and reduces him to the condition of the devils, who are only devils because infected with sin; sin, that renders us the horror of heaven, the disgrace of the earth, and the prey of hell. If we call to mind every misfortune in this life that can afflict a human soul, we shall find in sin misfortunes of the same kind, or still far greater. You grieve if you have lost the fruits of your past services, labors, and fatigues; you lose by sin all the fruits of your former good works. You grieve if you are exiled and forced to quit your native country; by sin you are banished from your happy home and native country, the kingdom of Heaven. You grieve if you have lost your reputation, and are branded with infamy; by sin you become vile, despicable objects in the sight of God and His Angels. You grieve if you are enslaved and deprived of your liberty; by sin you become slaves of the devil, and are liable to be imprisoned for ever in the fiery dungeons of hell. You grieve if confined to your bed by a malignant infirmity; by sin you are mortally wounded, and may perhaps be soon condemned to burn with merciless devils in unquenchable flames. You grieve for the loss of a spouse, a parent, a friend: by sin you lose your God, who is both a spouse, a most affectionate father, and the best of friends. You have then in sin all that is capable to afflict the human heart, and yet, alas! numberless heinous sins, blasphemies, perjuries, curses, injustices, and criminal excesses make less impression on the hearts of many than some trivial temporal misfortune, which scarce deserves their attention. O God offended, O justice of Heaven irritated, what will become of those unhappy sinners whose grief is but imaginary, and whose resolutions to destroy sin and to remove the causes of it are ineffectual, and

pass no farther than the lips? How many are there whose grief is but the working of pride and self-love, or a natural trouble and anxiety, proceeding merely from the fear of punishment? How many will you find who see nothing hateful in sin itself, and only relinquish it because it opens hell before them, and menaces them with eternal miseries? How many are there who only renounce sin exteriorly, and at the same time harbor and retain an affection for it in their hearts, like unto a valetudinarian, who with reluctance abstains from certain meats and liquors he is fond of, merely because they are judged to be hurtful to his health? If they are sorry for their sins, their sorrow amounts to no more than a wish they could sin with impunity. Like mercenary slaves, they regard nothing but threats and the torments of an hereafter; and were there no hell they would live like atheists, without faith, without religion or conscience. Like the wife of Lot, they hate not the city of Sodom, nor the crimes committed therein; but they dread the fire and sulphur that rained down upon it from Heaven. They are ready to commit any sin which they think is not mortal, because they believe it will not damn them: but alas! the offense and insult offered to God is a matter they totally disregard. The fear of hell, I must own, is in itself good and useful; according to the comparison of St. Augustine, it serves in the beginning to introduce charity, or the love of God into the heart, as a needle serves to introduce thread into a cloth that is sown; it is a preparation for repentance, but it is by no means the essence or substance of it. It must be tempered with love, like the fear of a favorite child; for as it was love that made you sinners, it is love only that can make you true penitents. It was love that carried your hearts away from God, and bestowed them on the creature; it is love, therefore, that must return your hearts again to God; for, as St. Augustine says, nothing renders *a repentance true and certain but the hatred of sin, and the love of God*. Such, my brethren, are the essential ingredients of that repentance which is necessary for the blotting out of sin. These happy dispositions are obtained by humble prayer, and by attentively considering the baseness and deformity of sin, the hatred which God bears it, the eternal flames prepared for it in the world to come, and all that Jesus Christ has suffered for the expiation of it. When, therefore, you have reflected seriously on these affecting truths, and daily considered the excess of your ingratitude to your compassionate Redeemer, who has poured out for your sake all the blood of His veins, and who still invites you to return to the arms

of His mercy ; when, in fine, your heart is gradually softened by these pious considerations, and melted into sorrow for having offended so good a God, and renewed the passion of His beloved Son Jesus, you may confidently hope that He will not despise your contrite and humbled heart. But you must also practice penitential works to expiate your past crimes, as I promised to show you in the second point.

There is a difference between the remission of sins which we obtain by the baptism of water, and that which we obtain by the baptism of penance ; the first is acquired easily and at a small expense, whereas the second costs us great labors and many tears, and is to be purchased by the practice of penitential works. There is still another difference ; in the sacrament of baptism our crimes are forgiven, both as to the guilt and the punishment, but in the sacrament of penance God treats us not with the same liberality and indulgence : He separates the pardon of sin from the pardon of the punishment ; He remits the guilt and the eternal torments of hell, which we deserve to suffer for transgressing His sacred laws, but He still reserves to Himself a right to inflict on us a temporal punishment, if we ourselves are not solicitous to prevent the rigor of His justice, by a penance proportioned to the number and heinousness of our crimes. This difference is grounded on God's justice, which, as the Council of Trent observes (Sess. 14), requires a difference in the manner of receiving those into mercy who, out of ignorance sinned before baptism, and those who, after having been redeemed out of the bondage of sin by baptism, relapse knowingly into sin, because by thus replunging into actual sin, after being washed and purified in the blood of Jesus Christ, by defiling the white robe of their baptismal innocence, by stripping themselves wilfully of sanctifying grace, and throwing off the sweet yoke of their Blessed Redeemer, they are guilty of a blacker ingratitude, their crimes are considerably greater. their guilt is remarkably aggravated, and consequently they deserve a far greater punishment by way of some atonement to the justice of God. Hence it follows, my brethren, that though you may have a true and sincere sorrow of heart for the crimes you have committed since your baptism, and though you may have obtained the pardon and remission of them, through the merits of Jesus Christ, applied to you in the sacrament of penance, you still lie under a strict obligation to satisfy the divine justice by the laborious exercises of penance and mortification.

If we turn over the books of the Old and New Testaments, we shall

find almost in every page some important truth relative to this obligation. The first word which the Almighty spoke to Adam was to impose on him a heavy penance, should he be so unfortunate as to violate the orders of Heaven ; and Adam no sooner transgressed than he was condemned to rigorous hardships, which lasted the whole course of his life. If the prophets of the Old Law opened their mouths, it was but to engage a sinful people to return to God by the austerities of a penitential life. John the Baptist, that divine precursor destined to prepare the way for Him who came to take away the sins of the world, begun his mission with these words : *Do the worthy fruits of penance* ; and Jesus Christ Himself spoke in the same language, when He first laid Himself out for the conversion of sinners : *Unless you do penance you will all perish*. No truth is established on a more solid foundation, no truth more frequently inculcated in the writings of the holy Fathers. The faithful of the primitive ages were so fully convinced hereof, that one single mortal sin after baptism was then punishable with a rigorous penance, and a weekly fast of three days on bread and water, and that for the space of three, seven, ten, and sometimes fifteen years. This spirit of penance continued for a long time in the Church, as appears from the penitential canons which were in force for several centuries after the establishment of the Christian religion ; and from the rigorous austerities of the Pauls, the Antonies, the Hilarions, the Pachomiuses, and numberless other holy anchorets, who deprived themselves of all the pleasures and comforts of this world, and pined away their days in penitential tears and regrets, in solitude and retirement, in the midst of deserts, and amidst rocks, serpents, and wild beasts. O happy days of Christianity, too soon expired, will you never more revisit the earth ? Shall we never again behold this spirit of penance revived, which to the end of time will reflect honor on religion, and confound the delicate penitents and half converts of this degenerate age, who seem to be startled at the very name of penance and mortification ? O what an affecting scene was it to behold then persons of each sex, from the highest to the lowest rank and station, place themselves in the classes of penitents, covered with sackcloth, their hair disheveled, their heads covered with ashes, prostrate with humility without the gates of the Church, in imitation of the lepers in the Old Law, who remained withoutside the camp of Israel till the time of their purification was expired. In this humble posture, their eyes fixed on the earth, and all bathed in tears, they struck their breasts, like the publican in the Gospel, and ceased

not to send up their sighs to Heaven, and cry out for mercy and pardon of their sins, by which they had the misfortune to sully the white robe of their baptismal sanctity. O how will their example confound us at the last day, my brethren, if we neglect the practice of penitential works? Can we pretend that our lives are more regular than the lives of the primitive Christians were? Is not the justice of God still unchangeably the same? Are works of penance and mortification less necessary in this depraved age than in the purest ages of the Church? Alas! we are persuaded that we have in many ways offended our God, and that if our sins are not remitted we shall be lost for all eternity. In the interim, we know not if our Sovereign Judge be yet appeased or reconciled to us or not; we know not whether we *be worthy of love or hatred*, as the Apostle says; we are uncertain of the efficacy of our past repentance, and consequently we are uncertain whether we be in the state of grace or in the state of damnation. Should not these reflections frequently alarm us? Should they not excite us to bewail our past sins in the bitterness of our souls, and do penance for them all the days of our life? Nay, though even an angel from Heaven should assure us of our having obtained the happy remission of our sins, this should not hinder us from doing penance as long as we live. King David was assured by the Prophet Nathan, on the part of God, that he was forgiven; nevertheless he did not cease to mingle his bread with ashes, and to water his couch with tears. Night and day the thought of his past sins drew streams from his eyes, sighs from his heart, and made him cry out to the Lord, *to wash him still more from his iniquity, and to cleanse him from his former sins*. In like manner, Mary Magdalen never ceased bewailing her former irregularities, though she had the comfort to hear the sentence of her absolution pronounced by Christ Himself in person. Not content with having lamented her sins at the feet of her Jesus, she passed almost the rest of her days in sighing and weeping in a desert; she condemned her eyes to perpetual tears; she made her body a victim of mortification, and her penance only ceased and ended with her last breath. The same was the disposition of Peter the Apostle. After having denied his Lord and Master, he never discontinued his repentance, but wept so often, and so constantly, that his eyes seemed to be two continual fountains of tears. Those examples, my brethren, should inspire you with a firm resolution to bring forth the fruits that are worthy of penance, how bitter soever and disagreeable they may appear to corrupt nature. Penance is the sole plank of safety you have left,

after the shipwreck of your baptismal innocence ; it is the only means to effect a reconciliation with the offended Deity ; it is the only gate by which you can expect to enter into the kingdom of Heaven. Remember, that if you depart this life, even in the state of penance, but without having discharged the full amount of the debt you owe the divine justice, or without having made sufficient reparation for the injury you have committed against the sovereign majesty of God, you must expect to be sentenced to a prison, from which you will not be released until you, as the Gospel speaks, *shall have paid the last farthing*, that is, according to the explanation of St. Jerome, until you shall have fully satisfied and atoned for the least venial sin you have been guilty of. You must either do penance here, says St. Augustine, or burn in flames hereafter, in proportion to the punishment due to your sins. *Aut pœnilendum, aut ardensum.*

O let me, then, entreat you to prevent the rigor of divine justice in the next life, by embracing voluntary exercises of penance in this life. Let me exhort you to redeem your sins with alms-deeds to the poor, as Daniel said to Nabuchodonosor, and to make up by the interior spirit of penance and mortification what your bodily infirmities, perhaps, may not allow you outwardly to perform. Bear the hardships, sufferings and afflictions of life with which you are visited with patience, humility, and resignation, as coming from the hand of God, and designed for the benefit of your souls. In fine, endeavor to expiate your past offenses by frequent and fervent acts of contrition, and do all the good works in your power whilst the light of grace and mercy shines, and before the fatal night of death overtakes you. O Almighty and Eternal God, grant us all the grace of true compunction, that we may bewail our sins in the bitterness of our souls, and make such atonement for them to Thy justice as our weakness is capable of. We acknowledge the tenderness of Thy mercy in having spared us hitherto, and given us time to repent, whilst thousands less criminal have suddenly died in their sins, and now lie burning in the flames of hell. O may Thy goodness be for ever blessed and praised ! By the same mercy we beseech Thee to grant us the great gift of final perseverance, that we may be of the happy number of those blessed souls who, in concert with the angelic choirs, are to sing Thy immortal praises in the kingdom of Heaven for a never-ending eternity. This is the happiness which I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

ON THE GOOD USE OF TIME.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

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| I. Introduction. | V. Consecration of time to God. |
| II. Toil and labor common to all. | VI. Consequences of using time properly. |
| III. Illustrations. | VII. Peroration. |
| IV. Gospel advice. | |

Quid statis hic tota die otiosi?—*St. Matt. c. xx. v. 6.*

Why stand you here all the day idle?—*St. Matt. c. xx. v. 6.*

ON this day the Church lays aside the Alleluias and Canticles of Joy which she made use of in the divine service since the Feast of our Saviour's Nativity, and puts on the penitential dress, in order to remind her children that the season of public penance and humiliation is now approaching, and that we ought to prepare for it in a religious manner, if we expect to be reconciled to the Lord, and to be delivered from the captivity of our sins; hence this Sunday is called *Septuagesima*, that is, the Seventieth, not only because it is about the seventieth day before Easter, but also because the captivity of sin, from which Christ came to deliver us about this holy time, was prefigured by the captivity of Babylon, that lasted seventy years. The Gospel appointed by the Church for this Sunday contains, in the opinion of Origen, one of the principal parables in the Scripture, that is, the parable of the father of a family, who, having hired workmen at the first, third, sixth, ninth and eleventh hours, to labor in his vineyard, reproved such as he found idling their time, and when the evening was come, requited all the laborers with the same salary, yet in proportion to the work they had done, according to the rules of distributive justice. Thus it is that every one is to be rewarded according to his works, at the night of death and on the day of judgment; those who shall be then found to have served God for a short time with great fervor and devotion, will receive an equal recompense with those who have labored indeed a longer time, but not with an equal fervency and ardor. Those who have been called at the last hour, or in an advanced age, and have done as much work as those who have been called at the first hour, or in their youth, shall be entitled to the same reward; the last shall be first, and the first shall be

last, as the Gospel says, for many are called but few are chosen. The Jews, who were called first to the light of faith, and who have borne the burden of the Old Law, shall be placed after the Gentiles, who were called at the eleventh hour. In short, every one shall then reap what he has sown—Gal. vi. *He who soweth sparingly, shall also reap sparingly, and he who soweth in blessings, shall also reap of blessings*—2 Cor. ix. Many will then, to their great confusion, find themselves poor and void of merits, who have it now in their power to manage their time to the advantage of their souls, and to enrich themselves by making daily advances in virtue. On the great day of reckoning, when time shall be for them no more, and when they shall be called to a strict account for every hour they have misspent, or thrown away in idleness, in frivolous amusements, empty projects, and delusive pleasures, they shall learn, to their unutterable sorrow, how offensive to God an idle, indolent life is, and what immense treasures are lost by it. To convince you, hereof, my brethren, and to excite you to make good use of your time, I will endeavor to show you, that as nothing is more pernicious, or more productive of great evils than idleness, so, on the contrary, nothing is more precious or more valuable than time well employed and filled up. In short, the necessity and utility of sanctifying our time, and employing it in a manner worthy of the divine acceptance, shall be the entire subject of the following discourse. Let us first implore the aid of Heaven, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, &c. *Ave Maria.*

It is a false notion of the luxurious and wealthy to imagine, that labor and toil were destined only for the poor and miserable, since the punishment incurred by the disobedience of our first parents is general and hereditary to all their posterity. The Almighty God has enjoined labor on mankind as a common penance due to sin, and we are all liable to the same sentence of gaining our bread with the sweat of our brow; no one is exempted from this general law; the rich as well as the poor are indispensably bound to shun idleness, and to employ with fidelity the time that God bestows them to work their salvation, by opposing vigilance to sloth, and virtue to vice; they are to apply themselves to some labor, either of body or of spirit, or some serious occupation conformable to the respective states and conditions to which Divine Providence has called them. It is said to have been a rule among the Jews, that all their children were to learn some trade with their studies, were it but to avoid idleness, and to exercise the body as well as the mind in

something serious, which made one of their Rabbies say, that a parent who neglects this duty is as criminal as if he taught his son to steal. St. Thomas of Aquin says, we are all commanded to labor according to our various functions and engagements in life, and in every thing we do we are to have always in view the honor and glory of our Creator, and the sanctification of our souls ; for it is beyond all dispute, that God has created us for no other end but to love and serve Him in this world, in order to see and enjoy Him in the next ; consequently, our time must be employed in serving Him, and in promoting His honor and glory. He has a strict right to all our thoughts, words, and actions, and as it is in Him we live, move and subsist, we ought to make Him the constant object of all our desires, the centre of all our affections, the beginning of all our enterprises, and the end of all our pursuits. This is our duty in quality of sinners, and in quality of Christians and servants of God. It is not enough for us to refrain from evil, but we must likewise devote our time to the practice of good works, and lead an active and laborious life according to our different conditions. We must shun idleness, which is the root and spring of numberless crimes, and the cause of much mischief, as the Holy Ghost speaks—Eccles. xxxiii. It is a stream that undermines the foundation of every virtue ; it is a rust of the mind, that gives a tincture of its nature to every action of a man's life, and a distaste for every thing that is good and praiseworthy. It is an inlet and an incentive to every vice, and, as St. Augustine remarks, it opens a gap for Satan to enter into the purest souls, and insinuate the vilest temptations and allurements to sin. The Scripture affords us a striking instance hereof in the holy King David, who, as long as he exercised himself in military affairs, was free from the assaults of lust, but as soon as he gave himself up to idleness at home, he became a victim to his passions, and fell into the abominable sins of adultery and murder. In like manner, whilst Solomon was occupied in building the temple, he was not overcome by lechery, but when he was idle he lay open to all the attacks of the devil, and fell into the most shameful disorders. Idleness also led the Sodomites into all their detestable excesses, as the Prophet Ezechiel informs us (c. xvi.), and no wonder, for as land that is not cultivated produces weeds and briars in abundance, and as stagnating water, which has no course or motion, putrifies, and engenders a number of nauseous insects, so, in like manner, according to St. Bernard, an idle, inactive, indolent life, is productive of nothing but sin and corruption. It is for this reason that St. Jerome gives the following advice to all

Christians : Be always occupied at some work or other, that the devil may find you always busy ; for he is not easily overcome by the devil who is always employed.

The anchorets of Egypt, and the solitaries in the deserts of Thebais, were so sensible hereof, that all the leisure hours they had to spare from prayer and contemplation, they employed in doing some manual works, as the aforesaid holy Doctor informs us, with the sole view of shunning idleness, and of being preserved from the evil suggestions of the enemy, by the exterior labor of their hands. They knew that time is too precious to waste a single hour of it in idleness, and that corporal labor and regular employment are capable of being sanctified and made subservient to the soul's eternal salvation. They considered an active and laborious life as both medicinal and satisfactory ; *medicinal*, because it is a preservative against vice, and *satisfactory*, because it is a powerful means to expiate sin, when it is embraced in the spirit of humility and penance, and performed in compliance with the will of God. O that the Christians of our days were deeply penetrated with the like sentiments, and took equal care to apply to honest industry and useful labor ! Were it not for the destructive vice of idleness, to which vast numbers of people of all descriptions are unhappily addicted, we should not behold so many fatal examples of justice going to the common place of execution, nor so many mobs and riots upon all occasions, nor so many drunkards and libertines rambling from street to street, destroying trade, impoverishing their families, and blaspheming the sacred name of their Creator ; the poor would be better supported than the play-house, the Church of God would be more frequented than balls, assemblies, and public shows, charity and industry would take the place of wantonness and prodigality ; so many precious hours would not be lavished in sinful conversation, in gambling, drinking, detraction, cursing, swearing, and reading pernicious books.

The Gospel gives us to understand that we are to be accountable on the day of judgment for every idle word we speak, and consequently for every idle hour we misspend, and prodigally throw away. O what a rigorous account, then, will be demanded of those who not only spend their time in idleness, but abuse it to a still more criminal purpose, devoting so many hours, days and nights, to the perpetration of the most shameful excesses, and the most scandalous works of darkness ? Have they not every reason to apprehend that the Sovereign Judge will pronounce a most dreadful sentence against them, since the workmen men-

tioned in this day's Gospel were condemned, merely for standing idle, and loitering away their time in doing nothing? We read in chap. xxv. of St. Matthew, that the slothful and unprofitable servant was sentenced to be cast into exterior darkness, amidst weeping and gnashing of teeth; yet the Scripture does not charge him with being either a drunkard, a debauchee, or a libertine; neither is he accused of having embezzled his master's substance; all the fault laid to his charge is, that he was indolent and slothful, and that he buried his talent in the ground instead of improving and turning it to some advantage. This plainly shows how offensive to God an idle, careless, and unactive life is, and how necessary it is to improve the time which God is pleased to lend us during our sojourn here on earth, to his greater honor and glory, and to the benefit of our souls. We are not to imagine that it is enough for us to shun evil; we must comply with the whole precept, by also doing good. *Decline from evil, and do good*, says the Royal Prophet—Ps. xxxvi. 27.

And really, my brethren, if to make proper use of our time, no more was required than merely to shun evil, and be guilty of no flagrant or palpable crimes, there are thousands of Pagans who might be considered to acquit themselves of this duty, as there are thousands among them from similar gross vices, but equally strangers to the shining virtues that are prescribed by the Christian religion. The Lord, in His great mercy, has vouchsafed to call to us a more exalted degree of perfection; He has made us His children, and promised us an eternal reward, not for passing our days in ease and indolence, but for serving Him with fervor and zeal; every hour of our life is a talent that He entrusts to us for negotiating the important affair of our salvation, and for gaining a happy eternity hereafter. If worldlings, therefore, deem it an unpardonable fault in a man of business to lose his time, make no use of his talents, and neglect wilfully a favorable opportunity of gaining a very considerable temporal advantage, how blameable must a Christian be, who having it in his power to lay up treasures for eternity every hour, neglects so many favorable opportunities of enriching his soul, and trifles away his precious time in sloth and idleness, as if it were of no value? The great lesson of Christianity is to consecrate every moment of our time to God, by employing it in a manner worthy of His divine acceptance; and to excite us to the performance of this duty, the Scripture exposes to our view the most pressing motives, by teaching us that time only appertains to God, that it is short and uncer-

tain, that the time that is once lost never returns, never can be recalled, is lost for eternity ; that it is granted to us by the mercy of God, to be so disposed and sanctified, as to conduct us one day to everlasting glory ; that time is not so much to be computed by the number of years of which it is composed, as by the benefit and good use that is made of it ; that we ought to endeavor to redeem the misspent time by applying ourselves with greater fervor and assiduity to the practice of good works, before the dark and fatal night of death overtakes us ; in fine, that all the time which is not well employed is idle time, time thrown away, and as the loss is irreparable, so it can never be sufficiently regretted. All our labors, toils, and fatigues are vain and useless, if they were not referred to the end of our creation, and directed to God's honor and glory ; they resemble the toils of a spider, which exhausts its substance in weaving a cobweb for catching flies and gathering dust, *telas aranæ texuerunt*—Isaias lix. 5. Unless we labor for Heaven, all the actions of our life are but a work founded on sand, which will turn to no lasting account ; we shall be deemed at the last day no better than useless and unprofitable servants, who have neglected their master's business, and loitered away their time at trifles. It is not the number of years we have lived, but the number of good works we shall have done that will be then regarded. This is the rule by which our days are measured, and our age is reckoned in the book of life ; this is the way to arrive at an honorable and respectable old age in a short time, for as the Holy Ghost teaches us in the Book of Wisdom, iv. 4, venerable old age is not to be computed by the number of years that a man lives here on earth, but by the number of merits he amasses, and the number of good works he performs in his lifetime. For this reason a spotless and virtuous life, though of no long duration, is called in the Scripture a long life, and the just man, who in a short time attains to a state of perfection, is said to fill up much age in a short space of time. It is for this reason also that Saul, King of Juda, is called a boy, though he was a man of a hundred years old, because as he had led a disorderly life for so many years, he was deemed to have nothing of old age but the wrinkles and infirmities ; all the time he misspent in vice is passed over in Holy Writ, and looked upon as lost, forgotten, and effaced, as if it never had existed. A profane historian would say that this unhappy king had reigned forty years over Juda, because in reckoning the years by the course of the sun, he is found to have sat so long on the throne of Juda ; but the Holy Ghost goes by another rule, which

is that of virtue, and only reckons the reign of Saul to have lasted two years, because he only reigned two years as he ought to have reigned.

If, my brethren, we proceed according to this rule, what a considerable part of our natural life shall we find retrenched and lopped off as being productive of no good fruits conducive to life everlasting? Several among us are come to the eleventh hour of the day, that is to an advanced age; they are drawing very near to the end of their career, and yet what a small portion of their time have they consecrated to God's service, and to their own sanctification? Two-thirds of their life should be employed in doing penance for their sins, and yet the greater part of their time has been spent in committing new faults, and in treasuring up more anger for themselves against the bitter day of wrath. On looking back, and taking a serious view of their past conduct, they will discover, perhaps to their great humiliation and confusion, that they have sacrificed the best of their days and the flower of their life to pride and vanity, to idle visits, trifling amusements, profane diversions, and the pursuits of such unlawful pleasures as are the source of never-ending miseries, without having the consolation of ever having served the Lord their God with fidelity one single day; they will find that they have, since the first use of reason, squandered away many hundreds, nay, many thousands of days in gratifying their passions; they will discover that they have frequently abused and profaned the most solemn festivals and converted holy days of salvation into days of rioting and gambling, luxury and debauchery. In fine, they will see that they have labored much for the world, gained nothing for heaven, made no provision for eternity, and that, though they have lost some millions of hours at trifles, they have not bestowed as many days or hours on the main chance as they have lived years; nay, that one hour well filled up and employed, would be worth more than a whole year, or an entire age, spent in the manner they have spent their time. O what an afflicting reflection will this be to a Christian at his dying hour, when, standing upon the verge of eternity he looks back and considers the ill use he has made of his time? Few accuse themselves now of this neglect, or are truly sensible of the greatness of their loss; but then we shall be convinced how valuable time is, and what treasures are lost by idleness. We shall then wish to recall one of those hours that are now so little regarded; but *time will then be no more*, says St. John. We shall then acknowledge, that all the goods, honors, and riches of the world are not worth one single hour, and, of course, that a Christian

suffers a greater loss by every hour he misspends, than if he had lost all the kingdoms and treasures of the earth ; for every hour he loses is a talent misapplied, it is an opportunity of merit neglected, it is an eternity lost, it is a grace slighted whereby everlasting riches might be amassed, and immense treasures stored up for a happy eternity. This made St. Bernard say, that though nothing seems to be less valued or esteemed by the generality of mankind than time, yet nothing is more precious or more estimable, since there is not a day or an hour of our life but we might purchase an infinite treasure, and entitle ourselves to an increase of God's grace here, and an immortal crown of glory hereafter. There is not one of our actions but might become an act of virtue, by being duly referred to the honor and glory of our Creator ; not one thought, word, or deed but might be made an agreeable sacrifice ; not a sigh of our hearts but might be rendered an act of charity, meritorious of life everlasting. What the damned souls never will be able to do for all eternity by their weeping, regrets and torments, we may do every moment by a devout act of contrition ; nay, we can do every day by a fervent act of faith, hope, and charity what the blessed souls in heaven cannot do in the space of a thousand years, by the purest acts of the love of God ; for as long as we are here on earth, and whilst the sun of grace and mercy shines, we have it in our power to merit every hour a new degree of God's grace, and, with the aid of divine grace, we may not only appease God's anger and obtain the pardon of our sins, but also grow rich in virtue, and merit a new degree of glory. By managing our time well, and sanctifying it by the practice of good works, we may merit the kingdom of Heaven, and the possession of God Himself for ever and ever ; but the time of merit is over for the blessed souls in heaven, as well as for the damned in hell ; neither the one nor the other are any longer in the way of meriting ; the night of death, after which no one can work, has overtaken them both, and put it out of the power of the former to merit any new degree of grace and glory, and out of the power of the latter to merit the least abatement in their pains. It is too late for them to think of working now. The reprobate, to their inexpressible grief, would not work whilst they had the daylight before them, and whilst they had a favorable opportunity ; were they now masters of ten thousand worlds, there is not a reprobate in hell but would joyfully sacrifice them all for one hour to repent, in case they were once more under a possibility of being saved thereby.

Let me conjure you, then, my brethren, to grow wise at their expense, and to be better economists of your time for the future. How precious will a life well employed and sanctified be in the sight of God, and what a consolation will it be to yourselves at your dying moments? Let me entreat you with the Apostolic words *to do good while you have time*—Gal. iv. 10. There is not an hour but is liberally bestowed on you to be improved to your advantage; *walk, therefore, whilst you have the light*, says Jesus Christ—John, xiii. 35. Advance in virtue, and make a daily progress in the way of perfection, that you may redeem and recover, in the best manner you are able, the time you have lost, and of which you have hitherto been so lavish and have made so little account. Imitate those travelers who, after tarrying a while on the road, hasten with greater speed when they find it growing late, and endeavor to make good their journey before the darkness of the night overtakes them. O merciful and compassionate Jesus! who didst vouchsafe to weep over Jerusalem because it neglected the time of its visitation and the day of salvation that was offered to it, preserve us for the future from the like insensibility. Pardon, we beseech Thee, our past neglects, and grant that we may henceforth make the proper use of our time whilst we are in the way of merit. If hitherto we have had the misfortune to spend the flower of our life and the best of our days in the service of the world, and in the pursuit of its deceitful allurements, we are at length become sensible of our folly, and repent that we have begun so late to know and love Thee, O Beauty, ever ancient and ever new. Give us grace to serve Thee the short remainder of our life, with a new zeal and fervor, and to satisfy for the long arrears of so many years of love and service as are already due to Thee. Make us sensible that a short satisfaction in vice is punished with the eternal torments of hell, and that a short labor in the practice of virtue is rewarded with the never-ending joys and glory of Heaven. Which I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY.

ON THE WORD OF GOD.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

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| I. The Word of God. | | III. Proper manner of hearing the |
| II. Our Blessed Saviour on the Word
of God. | | Word of God. |
| | | IV. Examples. |
| | | V. Peroration. |

Semen est Verbum Dei.—*St. Luc. c. viii. v. 11.*

The seed is the Word of God.—*St. Luke, c. viii. v. 11.*

THE Gospel distinguishes four different classes of people who hear the Word of God. One class consists of relapsing sinners, from whose hearts the devil immediately snatches this good seed, lest by giving it time to take deep root, it might produce in them the worthy fruits of repentance. Another class consists of obdurate and hardened sinners, on whose hearts the Word of God makes no lasting impression, but like unto a good seed that falls upon a rock, it decays and withers away for want of moisture. A third class consists of those who hear the Word of God with pleasure, but instead of reaping any considerable benefit from it, suffer it to be stifled and choked by the thorns and briars of their sinful affections, before it has time to grow up to its full maturity. A fourth class consists of those who hear the Word of God with the proper dispositions, and carefully remove every obstacle that might prevent it from fructifying in their souls; in them the Word of God yields fruit in abundance, like unto a good seed that is sown in a good soil, and that is copiously watered with the dew of heaven and kindly nourished in the bowels of the earth. To be convinced hereof, we need but consider the wonderful effects, and the amazing change that the Word of God wrought in a short time over the known world, at the very first dawn of Christianity. No sooner was it announced by a few illiterate fisherman but it wrought numberless conversions, and produced thousands of glorious martyrs and illustrious saints, of all states and conditions; it triumphed over the wisdom of philosophers, confounded the eloquence of orators, and subdued kingdoms and empires to the sweet yoke of the Gospel. It manifested the blind errors of paganism, opened the eyes of the Gentiles, and persuaded them to demolish the temples

of their idols, to pull down their altars, to abolish their impious sacrifices, to renounce their favorite superstitions, and to adore a crucified Jesus instead of a thundering Jupiter, a Mars, or a Venus. Is it not surprising, cries out St. John Chrysostom, that the Word of God does not continue to work the same conversions in our days, and to produce the same happy fruits which it formerly produced in the very bosom of idolatry? It never was preached more frequently than it is at present, and yet in appearance it never met with less success, never was more barren, never brought in a smaller harvest of souls to the Lord! To investigate the unhappy causes of this deplorable sterility of the Word of God, and to point out proper remedies for removing and preventing so dreadful an evil, is the design of the following discourse. In the first place I will show you that the present barrenness of the Word of God is not owing to the Word itself, but to certain defects and indispositions on our part which hinder it from fructifying. The dispositions necessarily required on our part to render the Word of God productive of the most salutary effects, shall be the subject of the second point. Come first, we beseech Thee, O Divine Spirit, descend into our souls, and preach to the hearts of my hearers what I am going to sound in their ears. That we may the more readily obtain this gracious favor from the Giver of all good gifts, let us devoutly implore the intercession of the ever-blessed Virgin, greeting her with the angel, and saying, *Ave Maria*.

Our Blessed Saviour, in the Gospel of this day, compares the Word of God to a good seed, and gives us to understand that three parts out of four of this good seed decay, perish, and are lost. One part only of it yields any fruit, although of its own nature it always has a most wonderful virtue and efficacy, and is now as powerful an incentive to virtue, and as effectual a preservative against the corruption of sin, as it was in the days of the Apostles. It is still as fruitful and productive in itself as it was at the first establishment of the Christian religion, when it humbled the pride of Cæsars, conquered the impiety of tyrants, and reformed the face of the universe with a success that struck the whole world with wonder and amaze. It is the self-same Gospel we preach to you, in the present age, that St. Peter preached to the Jews upward of eighteen hundred years ago, when, at his two first sermons, he converted eight thousand souls to the Lord. It is the self-same one, true saving faith we teach you, and the very same heavenly doctrine we announce to you, that St. Paul and the other disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ preached and announced, when, as the Scripture informs us, that

the Holy Ghost descended visibly on the faithful who were assembled together to hear the Word of God ; they preached no other word, they announced no other doctrine, when they planted the Standard of the Cross in the very capital of the Roman Empire, and extended their spiritual conquests beyond its remotest boundaries, than what we now-a-days preach and announce to you from our altars and pulpits ; for the Holy Catholic Church, guided always by the spirit of truth, has, in all ages since her infancy, taken particular care to preserve the Word of God in its primitive purity, and to hand it down from generation to generation undefiled and uncorrupted, as she received it originally from Christ and His Apostles, without ever allowing the least deviation or the least change, even in a single iota, in her doctrine of faith and morals. Whence comes it, then, that the apostolic preachers of former ages converted so many thousands by their sermons, and that the modern preachers make so few converts, gain over so small a number of souls, and see their labors crowned with so little success ? The Word of God has undergone no change or alteration in itself, as I have observed. Why then does it not yield the same good fruits in our days that it heretofore did ? It is plain that this sterility, so much to be lamented, cannot be attributed to the Word of God itself, so that it must be owing to some other cause ; it must be owing to the preachers, or to the hearers, or, perhaps, to both the one and the other. The learned Bellarmin complains loudly of those preachers who preach *themselves*, and not Jesus Christ ; they are not actuated, says he, with that fervor, that unction, that zeal, which animated the preachers of former ages, who had no other aim, no other intention, but to advance the divine honor, and the salvation of souls. Their sermons, in general, are not doctrinal, instructive, pathetic, nor addressed to the heart, like those of the primitive preachers, but seem rather to be discourses of parade, embellished with the flowers of rhetoric, dressed out with all the ornaments of human wisdom, and calculated more for pleasing the ears and exciting the admiration of the hearers by a pompous display of extraordinary talents, than for gaining their souls, converting their hearts, and exciting them to compunction for their sins. But if this be a shameful abuse and profanation of the sacred ministry, and one of the causes of the present sterility of the divine word, it cannot be doubted but the evil dispositions of the hearers are another principal cause that renders the heavenly seed unproductive and barren, and obstructs its inherent virtue and efficacy, much after the same manner that the operation of the very best

remedies is frequently prevented by the indisposition of the patient, and the wonderful efficacy and salutary effects of the holy sacraments themselves are often obstructed by the evil dispositions with which they are received.

As therefore the object of preachers, and the end of sermons, should be to instruct the people in the tenets of faith, and in sound morals, and to excite and move them to goodness, the people, on their part, if they wish to be favored with the unction of the Divine Spirit, and to reap any solid advantage from the Word of God, should hear it with a pure intention and a sincere desire of being enlightened and edified, excited and moved to the practice of virtue, and to a faithful compliance with the moral and religious duties of their respective states. The great St. Augustine, in his book of confessions, blames himself for having been deficient in this respect before his conversion. Instead of being actuated by this Christian motive and good intention, he tells us that he resorted to the sermons of St. Ambrose, on account of the eloquence of that holy Doctor, and not for the sake of his own spiritual improvement and edification, as he should have done. Puffed up with pride, and big in his own conceit, he despised the humble style of the Scriptures, and preferred the elegant, flowery expression of Cicero to the noble and majestic simplicity of the Word of God. This is an error not uncommon in our days ; although it must be acknowledged that truth never shines brighter, nor makes a deeper impression than in its own plain, native dress ; yet it is not relished by numbers who imagine themselves to be competent judges of a fine piece of oratory, unless it be decked out with all the pomp and glare of rhetorical flowers ; they attend more to the arrangement of the periods, and to the beauty of the language, than to the substance, the sense, and the doctrine. They come to a sermon, not for their spiritual improvement, but out of an idle curiosity, to criticise and pass a judgment on the brilliancy of the preacher's talents ; they come, as they express it, to kill time ; by being agreeably entertained with the graceful delivery and beautiful style of an elegant composition ; they come, in short, not so much with a desire of having the Word of God impressed on their hearts and minds, as with a desire of hearing the word of man, nicely spinning out one or two speculative propositions with logical precision and great ingenuity. If the preacher inculcates the great practical duties of religion, or unfolds the terrifying truths of the Gospel, they are apt to hear him with a kind of indifference ; if he speaks to them of the incomprehensible joys of Heaven, they hover, in

the interim, with their thoughts on the world, to which their hearts and affections are strongly attached ; if he expatiates on the horrid enormity of every mortal sin, on the indispensable obligation of doing penance, on the sad alternative of burning in flames of fire with merciless devils for an endless eternity in hell, they pay little attention or regard to what is said on the occasion ; they imagine that matters are exaggerated, they do not bring the subject home to themselves ; they think it more applicable to others, nay, they sometimes make a jest of it, like unto the unhappy people of Sodom and Gomorrha, who laughed at the salutary advice and charitable remonstrance of Lot, and continued in their criminal practices until they were consumed by the avenging flames that descended visibly upon them from the heavens. To reject the Word of God, to slight and neglect hearing it through contempt, or to refuse paying any attention to it, is to slight and reject with ingratitude one of the most powerful means that God in His great mercy has been pleased to provide for the conversion and sanctification of souls, and, consequently, it is an evil of so dangerous a tendency, that it is sufficient to provoke the Almighty, in His wrath, to withdraw from sinners the dew of heaven, to take from them the dispensers of His divine Word, and to abandon them to their own reprobate sense, like those unhappy nations which are involved in a deplorable ignorance of the mysteries of faith, or, as the Scripture phrase expresses it, *are seated in darkness, and in the shadow of death*. Christ our Lord ordered His disciples to quit such places and such people as would not pay attention to the doctrine they preached, and going out into the street to shake off the dust which had stuck to their feet, to denote thereby that they justly deserved to be rejected by God who rejected His Word ; He likewise pronounced a dreadful woe against the people of Corozain and Bethsaida, who took little notice of the words of eternal life, which He had so often preached to them : *Woe to ye, inhabitants of Corozain and Bethsaida*, said he, *if the same signs, which have been wrought among ye, had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have done penance in sackcloth and ashes*. He also foretold the Jews, that the kingdom of God would be taken from them on the same account, and given to a people that would bring forth better fruit, and correspond more faithfully with the gracious favors of Heaven. In effect, my brethren, what stronger proof can there be of a depraved and corrupted heart than to slight, reject, and despise the Word of God ? It is a dangerous symptom, and a plain indication of a disordered stomach, to reject good corporal food,

and a sign of sore eyes to hate and shun the light. The same light that revives and enlightens the sound eye is offensive to a sore eye, says St. Augustine, and the same food which a healthy man relishes and deems sweet and savory, appears insipid and unpalatable to a sickly man. In like manner the Word of God, which in itself is a lovely and reviving light to the children of God, and a delicious bread that nourishes the faith whereby the just man lives, appears unsavory, loathsome and disagreeable to the children of darkness. *They hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, that their works may not be reproved*, says St. John, iii. 20. St. Paul also remarks, *that carnal and sensual men have no taste or relish for the spiritual things that are of God; they do not receive the words of prudence, unless you speak to them concerning those things that their hearts are full of*, says the wise man, in the Book of Ecclesiasticus. Politics, theatrical performances, plays, comedies, novels and stories of gallantry, are their favorite pursuits and darling entertainments. They think nothing of throwing away three or four hours of their time at a party of pleasure, at a card table, in a tavern, or in a play-house; but it is with difficulty they are prevailed on sometimes to spend a single hour or half an hour in the whole week at a sermon or exhortation on the Lord's day. No sooner do they forsake the paths of virtue, and suffer themselves to be blinded and enslaved by their tyrannical passions, but they lose all taste and relish for the heavenly manna of the Word of God, and even conceive a dislike and aversion to it, in imitation of the children of Israel in the desert. The Scripture relates, that as long as they remained faithful to the Lord their God, and walked in the way of His commandments, the manna continued to be to them a heavenly food, that contained every kind of delicious taste that could gratify their palates; but no sooner did they relent in their fervor, and forgot their duty to God, than the manna lost its delicious taste and relish, and they began to cry out that *their soul did loathe this very light food*, until at length they provoked the wrath of the Almighty to that degree, that vast numbers of them were destroyed by fiery serpents in the desert—Numb. xxi. 1. Their misfortune should be a warning to all Christians to beware of following their example, and drawing down on themselves the indignation of Heaven. But let us now proceed to the dispositions with which the Word of God is to be heard.

As it is a proof of a corrupted heart, and a mark of reprobation, to disregard, undervalue, and reject the Word of God, according to this

terrifying sentence pronounced by our Blessed Saviour against the Jews (John viii. 4), *Ye hear not the words of God, because you are not of God*; so on the contrary, to be fond of hearing the Word, and to cherish it carefully in the heart, is considered to be a mark of predestination, according to these words of Christ: *He that is of God, heareth the words of God* (John viii. 47), and again (John x. 27), *My sheep hear my voice*. If we look back toward the infancy of the Church, we shall find that the primitive Christians were so fond of hearing the Word of God that they frequently suspended their worldly occupations, and hastened in great multitudes from all parts of Judea and Jerusalem, in order to nourish their souls with this heavenly manna; their spiritual hunger and thirst after it was so pressing, that it made them forget their corporal wants and necessities, and flock with alacrity in thousands together, to mountains and deserts for the same pious purpose; they even assembled in prisons and subterraneous caverns, in order to hear the Word of God from the mouth of their pastors and spiritual guides, which made St. Paul say, I am loaded with chains like a malefactor, but in the midst of my sufferings and afflictions I have the comfort to see that the Word of God is not bound or fettered; for my little flock, which I regard as my crown and my joy, takes care to assemble about me in the prison where I am confined, to hear the Word of God from my mouth. As long as this ardent desire to hear the Word of God continued, the spiritual kingdom of Christ was daily extended, the empire of Satan was gradually weakened, vice was detested, virtue was cherished, sinners were reclaimed, infidels were converted, religion flourished, and the faithful in general were inspired with a holy emulation to tend to the very summit of sanctity and perfection.

O, my brethren, if you were inflamed with the like ardent desire to hear the Word of God, there is no doubt but it would produce the like blessed fruits in our days. *Did you but know the gift of God*, as Christ formerly said to the Samaritan woman, to whom He vouchsafed to preach at the Well of Jacob—John iv. Did you but seriously consider what a signal blessing and gracious favor the Lord bestows on you, in sending you a number of preachers to announce His Word, to point out to you the sure road of salvation, and to preserve you from the darkness of infidelity which overspreads three parts of the world, you would be more thankful to Him for His mercies, more faithful in corresponding with His grace, more assiduous in frequenting sermons and exhortations. Several amongst us remember the time when we

would have gone with alacrity far and near to hear the Word of God, and would have been overjoyed to meet with one-tenth part of the many favorable opportunities we have at present to hear it. We remember the time when the following words of the Prophet Jeremias might have been justly applied to and really verified in us: *The little ones cried out for the bread of life, and there was no one to break it for them.* Glory be to God on high, the case is altered. The religion of our ancestors, planted in this island by St. Patrick upward of thirteen hundred years ago, is no longer deemed incompatible with the allegiance of good subjects; the sunshine of toleration has at length succeeded the gloomy season of penal laws, and Divine Providence has supplied the vineyard of Christ with numbers of active laborers, who study both day and night to cultivate it, and to feed the flock with the food of sound doctrine. These are blessings which you now enjoy in preference to thousands in other parts of the globe, and which will serve to render you the more accountable on the last day, unless you turn them to the advantage of your souls. Far, then, from suffering your zeal to slacken or your fervor to diminish, you should rather redouble it, and cheerfully embrace every favorable opportunity of hearing the Word of God as often as the duties of your respective states will permit. The pastors and preachers of the Church are bound, in conscience, to announce it to you; and on your part you are bound, in conscience, to hear it with docility and humility, as a voice from Heaven directed to each of you in particular. You are to hear it with a good intention of reducing it to practice, and regulating your conduct by it, since, as the Apostle says, *Not the hearers, but the doers and observers of God's Word are justified in His sight.* It is a spiritual bread, says St. Augustine, that must be chewed and digested, that is, you must ruminate and meditate upon it at your leisure, and carry it into execution. It is a seed that will not fructify, unless it be sown in a fit and suitable soil; every obstacle that would prevent its growth must be carefully removed; the briars and thorns of every inordinate affection must be wended out, lest the good seed be choked and suffocated before it comes to its full maturity. In short, the ground must be well prepared, the heart must be well disposed and purged for receiving it: it must be laid up in the mind, and deeply lodged and preserved in the bottom of the heart, lest the enemy should pick it up and snatch it away before it has time to take root. And since, as the Apostle speaks (1 Cor. iii.), *Neither he who plants, nor he who waters, is any-*

thing, but God, who gives the increase, His sacred unction and heavenly benediction ought to be devoutly implored ; without it the preacher is only a sounding trumpet, though he should speak the language of men and of angels ; his words will have no considerable effect, but will speedily vanish away from the mind ; they will strike the ears, but not mollify the stony heart of the sinner, nor work the conversion of his soul. This made St. Augustine say, that the principal preacher has his pulpit in heaven. Those who are ordained, authorized, and deputed by the Church, are His organs, *His ministers and the dispensers of His mysteries*. They are the *ambassadors of Christ*, as St. Paul styles them—2 Cor. xx. In the discharge of the sacred functions of their ministry they act not from themselves, but by His authority ; they speak to us in His name and on His part. He that hears them, hears Him ; he that despises them, despises Him ; and he that despises Him, despises His Heavenly Father who sent Him, as He expressly assures us—St. Luke x. They are the lawful heirs and successors of the Apostles, vested with the same authority and commission that Christ gave them to preach the Gospel, and teach all nations ; for as He commissioned the Apostles *to go and teach all nations to observe all things whatsoever He had commanded them* (Matt. xxviii.), and as He promised *at the same time to be with them all days, even to the consummation of the world*, in order to assist them continually in their functions of teaching and instructing, it is manifest that this commission was not confined to the persons of the Apostles, since they neither did nor could continue to teach all nations in their own persons, nor were they to continue upon earth to the end of the world ; consequently this commission was given by Christ to their office, that is, to them and to their successors in office, who shall continue to the end of the world, and complete the work of teaching all nations, which the Apostles began. These only are the teachers and preachers who have a right to announce *the Word of God to you*, and *whose faith* the Scripture orders you to *hear and follow* (Heb. xiii. 7, 9, and Matt. xviii. 17), lest you be *led astray by the various and strange doctrines* of those new gospellers and self-commissioned preachers, who, like the false prophets of the Old Law, adulterate the Word of God, and presume to preach and dogmatize without any mission, authority, or title whatever. *How shall they preach*, says St. Paul, (Rom. x.) *unless they be sent?*

Give us grace, O Divine Jesus, to hear Thy Word with every proper disposition. Take from us, we beseech Thee, that stony heart which

has hitherto resisted Thy grace, and frustrated the designs of Thy mercy. Give us a heart of flesh, susceptible of the impressions of Thy heavenly Spirit. Cultivate our barren souls, which are so apt to bring forth briars, thorns, and noxious weeds, ingrati- tudes without end, and sins without number. Water them with Thy inspirations, and bedew them with Thy graces, that Thy sacred Word may produce in us a hundred-fold fruit, and may dispose us for partaking one day of that happiness which Thou hast promised through the mouth of Thy Evangelist, saying, *Blessed are they who hear the Word of God, and keep it*—St. Luke, xi. 28. And this, my brethren, is the blessing which I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

ON THE NATURE AND NECESSITY OF DIVINE FAITH, &c.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. Introduction on the Gospel of the day, and on the efficacy of Divine Faith.
- II. Nature and necessity of Divine Faith.
- III. The Church is actually in possession of Divine Faith.
- IV. Peroration.

Respice, Fides tua te salvum fecit.—*St. Luc. c. xviii. v. 42.*

Receive thy sight ; thy faith hath made thee whole.—*St. Luke, c. xvi. v. 42.*

THESE words of comfort were spoken by the Saviour of the World to a poor blind man, who, sitting by the way-side on the road of Jericho, and learning from the crowd that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, cried out with a loud voice, *Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.* So great was his confidence in Jesus, and so ardent his desire of being restored to his eye-sight, that he was not to be discouraged by the opposition he met with from the crowd ; the more they checked him for his importunity, and the more they endeavored to impose silence on him, the more he raised his voice, and redoubled the fervor of his prayer to Jesus, to have mercy on him, until at length his perseverance was crowned with success, and the bowels of infinite mercy were moved to compassion ; for, as this day's Gospel informs us, Jesus stopped for a

while on the road, and having ordered the poor blind man to be brought near, He said to him, *What wilt thou that I do for thee?* Whereupon he replied, *Lord, that I may receive my sight.* And Jesus said to him, *Receive thy sight; thy faith hath made thee whole.* And accordingly he immediately received his sight, and began to follow his bountiful Benefactor, glorifying and praising God in conjunction with the multitude of people, who were eye-witnesses to this illustrious miracle.

Behold here, my brethren, a remarkable instance of the wonderful power and efficacy of a strong and lively faith. It is to it that our Blessed Redeemer attributes the miraculous cure of the aforesaid poor blind man; and the Gospel assures us that every thing becomes possible to it, every thing is granted to it; it is the foundation on which all Christian perfection is built, and the root from which every Christian virtue springs. *By faith the just man lives, and without it it is impossible to please God,* as the Apostle says—Heb. xi. 6. It is the first step to our salvation; for, as the first step by which man fell from the happy state of his original innocence was a proud affection of a more extensive knowledge than his all-wise Creator was pleased to allow him, so, in like manner, the first step we are to take in order to rise from sin and turn to God, is to pull down the idol of human pride and self-conceit, to subject our reason and senses to the Word of God, and to *captivate our understanding in obedience to Christ*, as the Apostle speaks—2 Cor. We must humbly acknowledge our own weakness and insufficiency, make a sacrifice of what is most dear to self-love, and correct the liberty of thinking and acting as we please, in order to pay due homage to God's infinite wisdom and veracity, by believing firmly all the sacred truths He has revealed, though we neither see them nor comprehend them. It is in humbling the pride of man in this manner, and in preferring the divine authority to any thing our own weak reason and senses can oppose to the contrary, that the merit of our faith consists. This is what renders it so acceptable to God; this is what preserves it free from all illusion, and sets it above all exception, in spite of all the specious arguments that human wit and learning are able to suggest. The Sacred Scriptures point out to us only *one true faith*, as there is only one true God, *one Spouse of Christ, one Sheep-fold, one House of God, one true Church, to which the Lord daily adds all that are to be saved.* And since the many contradictory sects and religious societies, into which Christianity is at present unhappily divided and subdivided, cannot be all in possession of this one true saving faith, it is

highly incumbent on us all to be well instructed in the nature of so necessary a means of salvation, and to know with certainty in what communion the true faith is preserved and professed in its primitive purity. This is the important subject which I will endeavor to elucidate in the following discourse for your edification, and that according to the advice of 1 St. Peter, iii. 15: *You may be always ready to give satisfaction to every one that asketh you a reason of that hope which is in you.* In the first point I will lay before you the nature of necessity of the virtue of divine faith; and in the second I will show you that the Holy Catholic Church is in actual possession of this one true saving faith. Let us previously implore the light and assistance of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, whom the Angel of the Lord greeted with the following words, *Ave Maria.*

Faith is a gift of God, according to these words of St. Paul (Ephes. ii. 8): *By grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, for it is the gift of God; and since it is the will of God that all men be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth,* as St. Paul also says—1 Tim. ii. 4. God does not refuse to bestow this gift on those who seek it in the sincerity of their hearts, and use their best endeavors to obtain it. If He does not grant it to many, it is either because they do not seek it with a sincere and upright heart, or because natural obstinacy, prejudice of education, worldly interest, human respect, temporal views, the fear of what the world will say and friends will think, or some considerations of this sort, blind their understandings that they may not see the truth, and avert their wills from embracing it. Our Blessed Saviour assures us (Matt. xi. 25), that His Heavenly Father hides the secrets of His divine wisdom from the wise and prudent, and reveals them to little ones. Hence the Apostle, in his epistle to the Hebrews (xi. 1), calls divine faith *the substance of things to be hoped for, and the evidence of things that appear not.* The sacred truths it proposes to be believed do not appear to us clear and evident in themselves, but rather obscure and impenetrable; they are sublime mysteries that surpass the force of human understanding, and are so far above our comprehension, that if God had not been pleased to reveal them to mankind, it would be impossible for us by all our researches, to come to the knowledge of them; neither reason nor experience, nor study, could ever give us any just idea of them; for if the most subtle philosophers, by the light of their natural reason, the force of their close study, and the strength of their genius, never have been yet able to account for

several things that are common and obvious in nature, how could we expect to fathom the profound secrets of Heaven with the short line of human reason, or be able, by our natural strength, to discover the abstruse and supernatural mysteries which belong to another world, and are so far from falling under our reason or senses, so as to be investigated by them, that they appear sometimes to be contrary to our natural reason, and to contradict our senses? But when we are aided by divine revelation, and strengthened by the gift of divine faith, our understanding is elevated, and our mind is enabled to perceive light through clouds of darkness, and we acquire a stronger conviction, and a fuller persuasion of the truth of the sacred revealed mysteries, than if we actually saw them with our eyes, because we do not depend for the truth of them upon any natural knowledge, nor upon the fallible evidence of our own senses, which often lead us astray, nor upon the testimony of men, who of themselves are liable to various errors and mistakes in the most ordinary things; but we rely upon the Word of God Himself, who cannot deceive us, as He is infinitely good, and who cannot be deceived, as He is infinitely wise. His divine revelation joins to the obscurity of the mysteries which it proposes to be believed, an evidence that renders them credible beyond all doubt. God Himself is our guarantee; our faith is built upon His sovereign truth, grounded immediately upon His infallible authority and has His infinite wisdom for its support. This is what gives a certain conviction, a solid peace and comfort to all believers. Men of the meanest capacity are capable of believing, with the help of divine grace, as well as the most learned divine; they have equally the same motive for their belief, and may silence the most acute philosopher who would attempt to shake them in their faith, by the reasonings of human wisdom, or by the dint of sophistical arguments. It must be acknowledged that nothing can be more just, nothing can be more agreeable to the dictates of right reason, than that we should believe what God has said, and proposed to be believed; it is enough that He has revealed it; it is our duty to acquiesce, and to submit our understanding and judgment, without holding any argument with Him, or presuming to canvass the truth of His words. We are allowed, indeed, to make use of our reason and judgment to inform ourselves about the matter, whether it be revealed or not, but we are no longer to argue the case, when we once know that God has spoken; then, instead of searching and inquiring how far His heavenly truths are conformable to the principles of human reason, it is our business to follow

the footsteps of Abraham, the father of the faithful, *who against hope believed in hope* (Rom. iv. 18), and as St. Peter exhorts us (1 Ep. ii.), to become by faith like rational babes, without guile or deceit, keeping our understanding in proper subjection to God's authority ; for, as our wills must be submissive and obedient in all things to His holy law, and as we must do even what is hard to be done, because He has commanded it, so in like manner our understandings are to submit humbly to all that God has revealed, and we are to believe even what is hard to be believed, because He has taught it. Moreover, as we ought to resist our inclinations whenever they solicit us to transgress the law of God, so we ought likewise to resist all the distrustful suggestions of an incredulous temper, and to cast down all human reasonings, with every imagination that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, as the Apostle speaks—2 Cor. x. A full, firm, and absolute assent must be given to all things revealed by God, whether we understand them or not, whether they be written or unwritten, since all the truths of divine faith stand upon the same testimony, and are equally grounded upon the authority of God, who is as infallible in the revelation of one mystery as He is in the revelation of another. To suppose His testimony and authority to be false in any one point, is to ruin it in all points, and to destroy the very foundation of all faith ; it is to reduce divine faith to a mere human faith, belief, fancy, and opinion, as St. Augustine formerly remarked to the unbelievers of his days, who made their own private judgment the rule of their belief. Ye, said this holy Doctor, who believe what ye please, and reject what ye do not comprehend, who admit some articles of faith, and disbelieve other articles, ye believe yourselves, and not the Gospel ; ye who divide the faith have no divine faith at all, for divine faith is entire and invisible. It comprehends the whole doctrine of Jesus Christ without exception, and requires us not only to believe in the divinity of His person, but likewise to believe, without hesitation, all His words and all that He has taught. Whoever discredits His authority in any one single article, or refuses to believe what He says in the Gospel, dishonors Him in a most irreligious manner, and cannot truly be said to believe Him to be God ; because, by questioning His veracity, and discrediting His Word, he impiously supposes Him to be either ignorant of the truth, or to be guilty of telling a lie, *which it is impossible for God to do* He that believeth not the Son, maketh Him a liar, says St. John, because he believeth not in the testimony which God has testified of His Son—1 John, v. 10. And

again (2 John, v. 9) : *He that continueth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God ;* and St. Paul tells us (2 Thess c. i.), *That they who obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, shall be punished with everlasting destruction.* *There is no salvation in any other, says St. Peter, for there is no other name under Heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved—Acts, iv. 12.*

His Gospel has been preached, and His faith has been propagated through the remotest parts of the known world by His Apostles, whom He commissioned to teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, with a solemn promise, *that he that shall believe, and be baptized, shall be saved, but he that shall not believe shall be condemned—Mark, xvi. 16.* The Apostles having obeyed His orders, and announced His doctrines to all people, whole nations were instructed in the principles of the true saving faith and baptized ; and the Church, being thus established, has ever since stood its ground in spite of all the revolutions of nature, the policy of empires, and the deceitful projects of Satan. Yes, my brethren, thanks be to God, you have shared in these advantages which the world derived from the zeal and labor of the Apostles. You have been baptized and made members of the Church of Jesus Christ ; you have embraced that divine faith which the primitive Christians embraced, and of which they were so tenacious, that they suffered the most excruciating torments, and sacrificed their lives, rather than renounce or deny any one point of their religious creed. A glorious and happy succession of upward of eighteen hundred years has transmitted the same faith which they profess to us, pure and unaltered ; and an untainted and uninterrupted tradition will undoubtedly hand it also down to the end of time, because it is the doctrine of a God *whose words shall never pass away, though heaven and earth should pass away.* But let us now examine by what means this faith, which was first revealed by Jesus Christ, and planted by the Apostles, has been preserved and conveyed down to us entire and uninterrupted, and by what rule and standard we may know to a certainty that we are in actual possession of it.

As the Divine Author and Founder of our Faith requires of us a belief of mysteries above our comprehension, He was not willing to leave us trusting to the weakness of our own reason, exposed to the uncertainty of our own private judgment, and to the manifest danger of being misled by our own fallible opinion in the most important matters of our religious belief, but in His great mercy and goodness He has taken care

to provide for our salvation after a more certain, a more easy and a more simple manner, and to give us a certain, universal, and plain rule of faith, adapted to all capacities. This rule of faith, which His divine wisdom has been pleased to appoint for us, is the testimony and authority of the Holy Catholic Church, which we profess in the Creed, and which is under the special protection of Heaven, and the guidance of the Holy Ghost. From this Church, founded by Christ for the instruction of *all*, spread for that purpose through *all* nations, and continued through *all* ages, every one may easily learn what he is to believe and do in order to be saved. It is this rule that cements union in faith, and that prevents the dissensions and innovations that are observable among those who have no bond of union or fixed standard for their belief, and are therefore constantly divided among themselves, and splitting into a strange variety of new sects. By adhering to this rule all the members of the Catholic Church, though widely differing in language, in manners, in customs, in humors, in climate, in government, and in temporal interests, everywhere believe the same religious truths, profess the same faith, teach the same doctrine, preach the same Gospel, hold the same principles, receive the same sacraments, and concur in one and the same worship. The religion of their Church has never varied in points of divine faith, but has always been, is at present, and ever will be, uniformly the same in every age. The writings of Christians, in all preceding ages, and in all the different nations of the world, plainly show that the faithful of this eighteenth century believe precisely what was believed in the seventeenth century, and that those of the seventeenth century believed what was believed in the sixteenth century, and those of the sixteenth century believed what was believed in the fifteenth century, and so up to the days of Christ and His Apostles. No new articles of faith were ever framed by the pastors of the Church; what they have taught in declaring any obscure or controverted point, was not their own private opinion, but precisely the self-same doctrine which they received from their predecessors in every preceding generation; for it is, and always has been an invariable principle, inculcated first by the Apostles in their writings, and ever since strictly observed as a fence and barrier against all innovations, never to deviate one single iota from the faith, but to adhere firmly to the doctrine received from the preceding generation, and to deliver it carefully to the succeeding generation, without addition or diminution. Hence we read in the New Testament so many dreadful menaces of perdition and destruction against unbe-

lievers, who presume to divide the faith of Jesus Christ, or attempt to change, adulterate, or corrupt any part of His doctrine, or to broach any novelty in matters appertaining to religion. St. Paul says, that though an angel should descend from Heaven for such a purpose, he ought to be looked upon as anathema, or accursed. It was upon this principle that the Arians, Macedonians, Nestorians, Pelagians, and other ancient sectaries, who attempted to make innovations in the doctrine of faith, were immediately opposed, detected, proscribed, and cut off as rotten members from the great body of the faithful.

In all ages the pastors of the Church, who are the guardians and depositories of the truths of faith, and the dispensers of the mysteries of God, as the Apostle speaks (1 Cor. iv.), have *contended earnestly for the ancient faith which was first delivered to the saints* (St. Jude, v. 3), and have been ever watchful to pluck up and root out the pernicious tares of error, whenever the enemy attempted to sow them over the good seed; and, as they took particular care to hand down from generation to generation the revealed truths, precisely as they had received them from their predecessors, it was impossible that any alteration or corruption should ever take place in the purity of a doctrine thus conveyed, and consequently it must have always continued uniformly the same; for if, for example, the pastors and their flocks of the second age received and believed nothing as revealed truths but what they had received as such from their predecessors of the apostolic age, it is manifest that the faith of the first and second age was perfectly the same; and again, if those of the second age delivered the same truths entire and uncorrupted to those of the third age, then the faith of the third age must infallibly have been the same with that of the two preceding ages, and this must necessarily be the case with every succeeding age to the present, and will be so to the end of the world.

Millions of Christians of this present age, living in the different kingdoms and nations of the earth, have seen, heard, and conversed with millions of their predecessors, and cannot be ignorant of the faith that every generation of them, from the cradle to the most advanced old age, held and professed. They bear witness of what the great body of pastors taught by common consent, and what all the faithful spread all over the world, and including always about sixty or eighty generations at once, unanimously believed before them in the last age. The same last preceding age gave the like testimony of the age immediately preceding it, for the same reason; so that, though the faithful of this pres-

ent age have not seen Jesus Christ or His Apostles, yet they are unexceptionable witnesses of what was taught and believed in their days, because they are unexceptionable witnesses of what was taught and believed by the generation that immediately preceded them ; and this generation was in like manner an unexceptionable witness of the doctrine and practice which it learned from the generation before it, and so upward to the very beginning of Christianity. This perpetual mixture and concatenation of so many ages and so many generations, interwoven the one with the other and twisted together, forms but one great body, or Church, spread all over the known world, yet still united in a religion, and composed of all true believers, who bear one testimony for upward of eighteen hundred years, that the faith we profess in the eighteenth century is the self-same that was professed by the primitive Christians. This plainly shows the *finger of God*, and His all-ruling providence to be visibly here, and is a convincing proof that His Church can never alter the faith. *The words which God once puts into her mouth, shall not depart from her mouth*, as the Prophst Isaias speaks, lix.

We cannot then go astray in following so sure a guide ; in hearing her we hear and obey Jesus Christ, who commands us to obey His Church, under pain of being deemed as heathens and publicans—Matt. xviii. 17. However, whilst we glory in the profession of the ancient faith of all preceding ages, and return thanks to the infinite goodness of God for the grace of our vocation to the true Church of Christ, in preference to so many others who are unhappily involved in the darkness of infidelity, we should beware of flattering ourselves into a false security, or imagining that a mere speculative and abstractive faith will be sufficient to save us. No, my brethren, though our faith should be supposed strong enough to remove mountains, as St. Paul speaks, yet it will avail us but little to life everlasting, unless it be animated with charity, and accompanied with the practice of good works. *Faith without works is dead, as the body without the spirit is dead*, says St. James, ii. 26. A dead barren faith of this nature will rather serve on the last day as the rule of our condemnation, than contribute to save us, or to entitle us to the blessing which our Saviour insured to the poor blind man in this day's Gospel, in the following words: *Fides tua te salvum fecit. Thy faith has saved thee*. The advantages and benefits of divine faith are indeed very signal and valuable in themselves ; but to reap them, it is not only necessary to believe what Christ has

revealed, but also to do what He has commanded. Our actions must agree with our belief, and our lives must correspond with our doctrine. We must live up to the dictates of our profession, practice its precepts, and honor it by the purity of our morals, this being the way to adore the Lord our God in spirit and truth. O merciful Jesus, grant us a lively and active faith, which worketh by charity, that we may partake of the happy fruits of Thy redemption. Direct our steps by Thy heavenly grace, that we may walk with circumspection and edification in the way of truth, and in the paths of virtue, during the course of our mortal life, and that we may one day arrive safely in those sacred mansions of bliss which Thou hast prepared for Thy faithful servants. And which I heartily wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT.

ON THE FORTY DAYS FAST OF LENT.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

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| I. The ordinance of fasting. | III. The advantages of fasting. |
| II. The necessity of fasting. | IV. The manner of fasting. |
| V. Peroration. | |

Cum Jejunasset quadraginta diebus et quadraginta noctibus, postea esurit.

Matt. c. iv. v. 2.

When Jesus had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterwards he was hungry.

Matt. c. iv. v. 2.

THE first and most ancient positive law that was given to man was that of fasting and abstinence. Scarce had our first parents been created, when God commanded them to abstain from eating the fruit of a certain tree that grew in the middle of the earthly Paradise. He put them into the hands of fasting, says St. John Chrysostom, as into the guardianship and care of a pious mother, and as long as they were observant of her orders, they continued in full possession of the happy state in which they had been created; they did not incur that dreadful sentence, *Thou art dust, and unto dust thou shalt return*, until they yielded to intemperance, and transgressed the precept enjoined them; it was then only that they forfeited their original innocence, and shut

the gates of Heaven against themselves and their posterity. Eating the forbidden fruit was the fatal source of their downfall, and the first cause of our ruin, says St. Augustine ; wherefore by a wise disposition of Providence, fasting became afterward the happy source of our restoration, and a means of our redemption ; for as Adam lost the glory of immortality, and involved his unhappy offspring in a long train of miseries and calamities, by indulging and gratifying his appetite, so Jesus Christ our Blessed Redeemer came to repair those evils by the virtue of abstinence, and to rescue mankind from the bondage of sin, by the penitential exercises of fasting, self-denial, and mortification. He vouchsafed to give us His life for a model, as well as His blood for a ransom, and to leave us an example of every virtue we stood in need of. Hence, as the Gospel of this day informs us, He retired into a frightful desert near the river Jordan, where He spent forty days and forty nights successively, without any earthly comfort, and macerated His virginal body with a continual fast, miraculously supporting its life, vigor and strength, that it might be able to endure, for our sake, the extremity of hunger, and the full austerity of so long an abstinence. It was in imitation hereof that the solemn fast of the forty days of Lent has been instituted in the very infancy of the Church, and religiously observed ever since by the faithful in all ages throughout the known world. It is as ancient as Christianity, and as St. Jerome says (Ep. 54. ad Marcel.), has been received by tradition from the twelve Apostles of Jesus Christ.

To induce you to a due and regular observance of so venerable an institution, I will lay before you the necessity and advantages of fasting, together with the manner in which we ought to fast. The necessity of fasting will teach us why we are commanded to fast ; the advantages of fasting will inspire us with courage and resolution to fast ; and the manner of fasting will instruct us how we are to comply with this religious duty. The necessity and advantages of fasting shall be the subject of the first point. The manner of fasting shall be the subject of the second. Let us previously implore the aid of Heaven, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, &c. *Ave Maria.*

To be convinced of the necessity of fasting, we need only consider the number and enormity of our sins, the violence of our passions, and the many dangerous temptations to which we are constantly exposed. In the first place, our crimes have assaulted the very throne of divine justice, and cry aloud to Heaven for vengeance. What penance have

we hitherto done? What degree of atonement and satisfaction have we made for them? If we compare our lives with the lives of those illustrious penitents, who looked upon a single mortal sin as sufficient to make a sinner weep and do penance for an eternity; if we measure our past penitential works by the maxims of the Gospel, or by the penitential canons of the primitive Church, which occasionally prescribed a rigorous fast of five, seven, ten, nay, sometimes fifteen years, on bread and water, and sackcloth and ashes, for the expiation of a single mortal sin, alas! we shall find ourselves very deficient in this point. We shall acknowledge ourselves greatly in arrears, and still much indebted to the divine justice for the numberless sins whereby we have violated the solemn vows of our baptism, transgressed the sacred laws of our Creator, and defiled every organ of our senses, every faculty and power of our souls. Should we not then have recourse to fasting, to abstinence, and the like works of penance and mortification, in order to cancel these sins, to melt the tender bowels of God's mercy to compassion, and to satisfy His divine justice, the infinite weight of which we must otherwise fall under one day, since, as St. Augustine says, every sin, great and small, must be punished, either in this life or in the next, either by the voluntary penance of man, or by the vengeance of an angry God. That fasting is a necessary ingredient of penance, and a most powerful means to disarm the justice of God, and to avert His indignation, appears clearly from several parts of the Sacred Scriptures. The Old Testament informs us that God Himself enjoined fasting on sinners, expressly exhorting them by His prophets, to be converted with their whole heart *in fasting, in weeping, and in mourning*. The memorable fast of the people of Ninive, the fast of King Achab, and of King David, the weekly, monthly, and yearly fasts prescribed by the Jewish law, proves beyond a doubt, that fasting is a necessary and powerful means to appease the wrath of Heaven.

As for the new law of grace, it is evident from the Gospel that our Blessed Redeemer has recommended fasting both by His word and example, and laid down rules and prescribed the conditions by which our fasting is to be sanctified and rendered the acceptable fast which God requires—Matt. vi. 16, and xii. 20. He likewise foretold the Jews, that after His visible departure from the world, and glorious ascension into Heaven, His disciples and followers should observe regular fasts, no less than the disciples of St. John the Baptist, who were remarkable for the rigor and austerity of their fasts. Far, then, from

imagining ourselves freed and dispensed with in the New Testament from the necessity of fasting, as the freethinkers and libertines of our days erroneously pretend; far from flattering ourselves that we are exempted from the general law of doing penance, or discharged from the obligation of punishing and destroying sin in ourselves, we must acknowledge the necessity of executing upon ourselves something of that punishment which our manifold sins deserve.

Hence Christ expressly declares in the Gospel, that unless we do penance we shall all perish. He requires us to contribute the small mite of our own poor endeavors, in conjunction with His infinite satisfactions, It is not enough that He has paid the price of our redemption, and superabundantly satisfied for our sins; we must also co-operate on our part, and, as St. Paul speaks, fulfill in ourselves what is wanting to the application of the fruits of His passion. We must bear in our bodies some resemblance of His mortification. We must, in fine, comply on our side with the conditions which He requires, in order to obtain the remission of our sins, and to be made partakers of the infinite merits of His death.

Though we were even assured by an angel from Heaven, of our having obtained the happy remission of our sins by virtue of the holy sacraments, yet this should not encourage us to lead a slothful, indolent life, or neglect the duties of fasting, abstinence, and such like penitential and satisfactory works, because though our sins should be supposed to be remitted, both as to the guilt and the eternal punishment due to them in hell, there might still remain, and usually does remain, some debt of temporal punishment to be atoned for, either in this life or in the next, until we shall have paid the very last farthing to the divine justice, as the Gospel phrase expresses it. King David had the comfort to hear the sentence of his pardon pronounced by the Prophet Nathan sent to him by God, and Mary Magdalen was assured by Christ Himself, that her sins were remitted, yet this did not hinder either the one or the other from spending the remainder of their days in the practice of the most austere fasts, self-denials, and mortifications. This shows, my brethren, how incumbent it is on you to fast, to abstain, and lead a penitential life, especially as you are so far from having the like assurance of your past sins being pardoned, that on the contrary you have but too much reason to tremble for yourselves, and to suspect the validity of your repentance, on account of your many broken promises, and your constant relapses, after so many reiterated confessions.

But let us suppose that you have approached the sacraments of reconciliation with the proper dispositions, and that your former sins have been fully expiated, both as to the guilt and the entire punishment due to them, which no one can have a certainty of during the course of this mortal life, without a special revelation from God ; let us even suppose that you have hitherto preserved your baptismal innocence pure and undefiled, which few, very few can promise themselves, it would even in this supposition, be still necessary for you to fast and practice works of self-denial and mortification, in order to subdue your passions, to conquer the various temptations that surround you, and to preserve yourselves from the danger of falling into new sins. You are to fast, says St. Basil, because you have sinned ; and you are to fast, likewise, in order to prevent the danger of falling again into sin ; fasting being not only a powerful means to obtain pardon of the sins already committed, but also a sovereign antidote against future sins, and a most effectual remedy to overcome temptations, to vanquish the devil, and defeat all his malicious designs.

Fasting bridles concupiscence, quenches the flames of lust, restrains the violence of the passions, tames the rebellious flesh, and heals the disorders of the body as well as of the soul. Fasting is the best physic to prevent and to remove many corporal distempers, and the surest means to re-establish a broken constitution ; for it has been often proved by experience, that diseases have been cured by abstinence and fasting which obstinately defied all the power of the strongest medicines. The wonderful effects of fasting appeared visibly in Moses, Elias, Judith, and Sampson, Daniel, and the Hebrew children in the captivity of Babylon. It was by fasting that the holy martyrs rendered themselves terrible to the devil, and impenetrable to all his fiery darts. It was by fasting that the Antonies, the Pauls, the Macariuses, the Jeromes, the Hilarians, and numberless other recluses and solitaries in the desert prolonged their lives to an amazing length. It was by fasting that they triumphed over their passions, defeated the spiritual enemies of their souls, raised the lofty tower of evangelic perfection, and arrived at the summit of virtue. It was, in fine, by fasting that Jesus Christ prepared Himself for combating against Satan in the desert. He was incapable of being overcome by any temptation, as His divinity placed Him in a region above sin. He had neither faults to expiate, nor passions to suppress, nor evil inclinations to destroy, nor even virtue to acquire, as He was holiness itself ; but He was willing to teach us by His example with what wea-

pons we are to arm and defend ourselves against all the assaults and suggestions of the devil, the world, and the flesh. He fasted forty days and forty nights in the desert. He stood in no need of fasting for Himself. He fasted for our sake and for our sins. Can we then refuse to copy after the example He has set us, and to join our fasts with His; we, alas! who have so many sins to atone for, so many vicious affections to combat, so many unruly passions to subdue, so many evil habits to master, so many dangerous temptations to encounter, both within and without? Can we any longer doubt of the necessity and the signal advantages of fasting? Should not the example of our Divine Redeemer animate us above all things to the practice of this noble virtue, and make us blush at the thoughts of our past negligence and tepidity? Should it not inspire us with courage to begin the present solemn fast of Lent with cheerfulness for His sake, and to go through it in the spirit of compunction, and in the manner we are directed by the Church? When sanctity of life and purity of morals were the distinguishing character of Christians, it is almost incredible to what lengths they pushed the virtue of fasting. The accounts that ecclesiastical history gives of their austerities are really amazing, and more than sufficient to confound our remissness and sloth. They show plainly how ill-grounded the murmurs and complaints of many of our modern Christians are, and what our nature is capable of bearing, notwithstanding our pretended delicacy, had we but a little more piety, courage, and resolution. But, alas! a carnal, sensual and epicurean life is now-a-days become so fashionable in this nation, heretofore so renowned for fasting, that several Catholics, resembling the children of Israel in the captivity of Babylon, are but too ready to swallow the unsanctified notions, and imitate the example of unprincipled and irreligious men with whom they converse. Nay, some of them are neither afraid nor ashamed to exclaim against the precept of fasting, and to cry down the days of abstinence as boldly as the most strenuous advocates of self-love, *whose God is their belly, and whose end is perdition*, as the Apostle speaks. They even quote Scripture in support of their irreligious proceedings, as Satan himself quoted Scripture against the Son of God, when He had fasted forty days and forty nights in the desert. As for the words of St. Paul, which they erroneously recur to, it is to be observed that they only condemn a scrupulous inquiry and abstinence from certain eatables, from a superstitious notion of their being unclean in their own nature, or created by some evil principle; for the Apostle is so far from disapproving the fasts of

the Church, or the abstaining, at certain times, from certain nourishing and agreeable meats through a motive of religion, and by way of self-denial and mortification, that He expressly says (Ep. ad Rom. and 2 Cor. vi.), that it is good to abstain from flesh and wine for the spiritual advantage of the soul; but they reply, *What goes into the mouth, does not defile the soul.* It is true that there is no uncleanness in the food going into the mouth that will defile the soul of him who does not, like the Pharisees, first wash his hands, as our Saviour told them; but if what goes into the mouth be a transgression of the precept of God, or a fast commanded by the Church, the disobedience thereby incurred will defile the soul of the offender; and thus Adam was defiled by eating the forbidden fruit; a Jew would have been defiled by eating swine's flesh, and a drunkard is defiled by swallowing a considerable quantity of intoxicating liquors.

In the primitive ages of Christianity, the faithful fasted every day in Lent till after sunset, and what they eat then was plain wholesome food, so common and so cheap as to occasion a great saving in the expenses of their tables; all that was thus saved being distributed in charity amongst the poor, which made St. Augustine say, that one of their reasons for fasting on one meal was, that the poor might receive what would be otherwise spent on account of a second meal. One meal, or refection, in the four-and-twenty hours, was all that was thought of on a fasting day, and the same was confined to such narrow circumstances, that fasts of our days, compared with them, scarce have the appearance of fasts. Nice and delicate dishes, which are calculated rather for luxury than for mortification, rather for feasting than for fasting, were carefully banished from their tables. To drink on fasting days, except at the meal hour, was no less forbid than to eat. The use of wine, and of other strong liquors, was not even allowed at the meal, as St. Augustine informs us (1. 3, contra Faustum, c. 4), for it was the opinion of our pious ancestors that a true fast required an abstinence from drink as well as from meat, which made St. Gregory of Nysse say, *We endure both hunger and thirst, in hopes of being admitted one day to drink of the fountains of living waters;* and St. Basil adds, *We abstain from flesh and wine, and live on pulse, and drink only water, as Adam did in Paradise, in the state of innocence.* So far were the primitive Christians from resembling those Catholics of our days, who take the liberty of drinking a considerable quantity of wine, drams, and strong malt liquors between meals, with little or no remorse,

and who pretend to justify themselves herein by quoting that common and ill-grounded saying, *Liquid breaks no fast*, with as much confidence as if it was to be found among the proverbs of Solomon, or the sacred Canons of the Council of Trent. But this is a new maxim that the ancients were unacquainted with ; they knew nothing of such unwarrantable liberties, nor of suppers and collations on fast days, except the spiritual collations and pious conferences that were in former ages usually held in the evening on fast days, for the refreshment of the soul. These spiritual collations, in process of time, have degenerated into corporal collations, which, besides the one meal of fasting-fare that is allowed in the afternoon on fasting days, the modern discipline of the Church also tolerates at night, provided we keep within the regular bounds, both as to the quality and quantity, which should not exceed a quarter, or one-fourth of an ordinary supper, or thereabouts. Some divines restrain the quantity of a collation to two ounces, others to four ounces at most. As for a breakfast on a fast day, the very word *break-fast* itself gives us a hint of our duty, and tells us that it is a formal breach of the fast, unless there subsists a just cause, or some weighty reason for taking a morsel of bread, a cup of chocolate, or some small matter in the morning, by way of preservative, to prevent cholics or other dangerous complaints. Those who have a mind to fast in a Christian manner, ought to remember, that it is not sufficient to comply with the bare letter of the law, but they must keep up to the spirit of the Church as near as possible, and take care not to defeat or counteract the end for which the fast was ordained. The outward ceremony will not avail if we neglect the essence and substance ; a bare abstinence from meat is nothing more than the shell or the external bark of our obligation. The main design of the fast is to mortify our passions and amend our lives ; we must fast with a deep sense of repentance for having offended God, and a hearty desire and resolution of a new life. As for the sick and infirm, who are unable to fast on one meal, or even to abstain, and whose poverty and hard labor are incompatible with fasting, and render their whole life, as I may say, one continual Lent, as is the case of a great number of the laborious poor, they must bear their disorders, sufferings, hardships, crosses, and afflictions with greater patience and resignation, in order to make up, by the interior spirit of penance, what their bodily infirmities will not allow them to perform. They are not to take the liberty of living without rule or restraint at this holy time, but must endeavor to take what part they are able in

the general penance of the Church ; they must make up the deficiency, and supply what is wanting to the outward fast and mortification of the body, by inward spiritual mortifications, by fervent prayers, by bountiful alms, if they are able, and by other good works ; for though they may be dispensed with in the rigorous observance of the Lent, yet they are not, they cannot be dispensed with in the obligation of doing penance for their sins, this being a divine and indispensable precept that must be complied with by some means or other in our power. The great and general fast of every Christian is to fast from sin, from drunkenness, from thieving, from cursing, swearing, and blaspheming. This fast admits of no dispensation, but is absolutely necessary at all times, in all places, and for all persons, both young and old, sick and healthy, rich and poor, during the whole course of their life. Therefore St. Augustine says, Let us above all things fast from sin, that our fasts may not be rejected, like the fasts of the Jews, mentioned in ch. lviii. of *Isaias*. Let us fast from pride, from covetousness, from lechery, from anger, from gluttony, envy and sloth. Let us fast from every other vice, that whilst our bodies abstain from food, our souls may be nourished with divine grace. Our eyes, which have often led us into the snares of Satan, should fast in their way from curiously beholding vain and criminal objects ; they should fast from theatrical shows, stage entertainments, play-books, novels and romances. Our ears should be henceforth shut to all poisonous discourses, and only open to edifying instruction, and Christian conversation. Our tongues should abstain from slander and detraction, and be employed in glorifying the name of God, in proclaiming His mercies, and craving pardon of our sins. In short, our hands should fast from immoral actions, our hearts from irregular desires, and all our senses and faculties from the dangerous occasions of sin. This is the true fast, says St. John Chrysostom ; for what does it avail to abstain from certain meats, and to wallow in sin ? What does it avail to refrain from drinking wine, and to be drunk with iniquity ? says St. Ambrose. What does it avail to emaciate our faces, and to grow pale with fasting, if our souls be full of pride, and black with envy and malice ? The first condition that must accompany our fasts, is to renounce sin, and so fast with a penitential spirit, with a contrite and humbled heart. The second condition is, to fast with a pure intention of pleasing God, through a motive of religion, of penance, of mortification, of obedience to the Church, and not like the Pharisees, through a motive of vain glory and hypocrisy ; not like

misers, through a motive of avarice ; not like epicures, through a motive of gluttony ; nor like Mahometans, through a motive of superstition ; but like good Christians, through religious and proper motives. The third condition is, to join fervent prayers and abundant alms with our fasts, according to the advice that the Archangel Raphael gave to Tobias, when he said : *Prayer is good with fasting and alms-deeds, more than to lay up treasures of gold.* At least prayer and fasting should always go hand in hand together, as inseparable companions ; they are the two wings of a repenting soul, by the help of which she ascends to heaven, and effects her peace with God. Such fasts as these, accompanied with devout prayers and bountiful alms, cannot fail of being acceptable to God, at this holy time, when the universal Church all over the world, joined in one great body, is unanimously suing to Heaven for mercy and pardon by a general penance. Let me then entreat you all, with the words of the Prophet Joel (c. ii.) to sanctify in this manner this solemn fast of Lent. Let me beseech those who are in the unhappy state of mortal sin, to approach without delay the sacred Tribunal of Penance with the necessary dispositions, that their fasts, their alms-deeds and prayers may become more pleasing and more meritorious in the sight of God, by being performed in the state of grace. Perhaps this will be the last Lent that many of you will ever live to see. Let me then exhort you to live soberly, justly, and piously during it, and not to convert these days of mercy, grace, and salvation into days of gambling, rioting, and perdition. Do not turn the remedy into poison ; do not make this holy, this acceptable time, so proper to appease the anger of God, serve only to provoke Him more. Unite your fasts with the forty days fast of your Blessed Saviour, and lament all the sins and offenses of your life in the bitterness of your souls ; for it is just that your sins should draw bitter tears from your eyes, since they drew streams of blood from the veins of your loving Jesus. O amiable Redeemer ! blessed for ever and praised be Thy holy name. How great is Thy mercy, O Lord, in having spared us so long, and in giving us still time to repent. By the same mercy we beseech Thee to give us grace to go through this penitential season ; and perform this holy quarantine with fervor and zeal, with piety and devotion, that being freed from the galling yoke of Satan, and purified from the foul stains of sin, we may be duly qualified to approach the venerable Sacrament of Thy blessed body and blood at the solemnity of Easter, and that after celebrating worthily the anniversary of Thy sacred passion and

death, we may rise with Thee to a new life, and partake of the happy fruits of Thy glorious resurrection. Which I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT.

ON THE DEPLORABLE STATE OF A CHRISTIAN WHO IS COLD AND INSENSIBLE WITH REGARD TO HEAVEN.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

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| I. Description of the Transfiguration. | III. A Christian without Hope. |
| II. A Christian without Faith. | IV. A Christian without Charity. |

V. Peroration.

Domine, bonum est nos hic esse.—*St. Matt. c. xvii. v. 4.*

Lord, it is good for us to be here.—*St. Matt. c. xvii. v. 4.*

THE Church, in order to strengthen the faith, nourish the hope, inflame the charity, and animate the zeal of her children in this holy time of penance and mortification, proposes for the subject of this day's Gospel the mystery of the glorious transfiguration of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, which happened on Mount Thabor, in the presence of three of His disciples, Peter, James, and John his brother; for as these were afterward to be the sad eye-witnesses of His bloody agony in the garden of Gethsemani, and of His crucifixion on Mount Calvary, it was expedient that they should likewise be spectators of the glorious transfiguration of His sacred humanity, and behold a transient ray of the splendor and majesty of His divinity displayed on Mount Thabor. Moses, the legislator of the Jews, and Elias, the most zealous of the prophets of the Old Law, appeared at the same time on the Mount, standing by Jesus Christ, overshadowed by a bright cloud, and, as it were, bearing testimony that he was the Messias, promised both by the Law and the ancient prophets, whom they represented. The three disciples were in transports and raptures of joy, when they beheld the face of their dear Lord and Master shining like the sun, and His garments becoming on a sudden as white as the driven snow. They imagined themselves already happy, and were satisfied to establish their mansion on the Mount; nay, Peter could not forbear crying out in the name of

the rest, *Lord, it is good for us to be here* ; let us not quit this charming place, but, if Thou art pleased, let us make three tabernacles here, one for Thee, one for Moses, and another for Elias. One bright ray, that appeared for a short time on the countenance of Jesus, had such an effect on the disciples, that they despised all earthly pleasures, and looked upon the world with scorn and disdain ; they were ready to part with everything in it, and remain on the Mount with their Lord, whom they beheld thus transformed. Yet, my brethren, His transfiguration was but an antepast, figure, and glimpse of that endless glory and permanent happiness which awaits the servants of God in the kingdom of Heaven, after the toils and labors of this mortal life. It is there that the blessed may truly say, *Lord, it is good for us to be here*. It is there that they find themselves incessantly in ecstasies of love, and raptures of joy, because they incessantly see God face to face, and contemplate His infinite beauty and perfection for a never-ending eternity. O what a blessed sight is this ? How glorious, how charming, how worthy of the most ardent desires, and the most zealous pursuits of a Christian soul ? Yet, alas ! to seek this happiness, and to labor for the fruition and possession of God, and of His heavenly kingdom, is, of all pursuits and occupations, that which seems least to engage the attention and care of the generality of Christians, who are so strongly attached to the imaginary happiness of this transitory life, that they are insensible to the real advantages of future happiness. To dissuade you from, and guard you against this shameful indolence and culpable neglect of your sovereign happiness, and at the same time to excite you to seek the kingdom of God with fervor, is the design of the present discourse. In the first point I will show you that the state of a Christian who is cold and insensible in regard to Heaven, is truly deplorable. The means to overcome this coldness and insensibility shall be the subject of the second point. Let us previously invoke the assistance of the Divine Spirit, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, whom the Angel saluted with the following words, *Ave Maria*.

To convince you that the state of a Christian who is cold and insensible in regard to Heaven is truly deplorable, it may be sufficient to show you that he lives without faith, without hope, and without charity, or the love of God : and what is a Christian without faith, hope, and the love of God, but one in a state of reprobation, and consequently exposed every moment to the evident danger of falling a sad victim to the rigors of divine justice ? In the first place, such a Christian may be

said to live without faith ; for how can he be supposed to believe that there is a heaven, and still be so cold and insensible as not to labor for it ? I do not consider heaven at present, inasmuch as it is the palace of God, and the abode of the angels and saints ; but what I consider is, what is proposed to us in this most charming mansion of bliss, as the principal recompense of Christian virtues and goods works. And this is nothing less than God Himself, in the sight, love, and enjoyment of whom consists the essential beatitude of the soul. It is this ravishing object that the blessed behold for ever face to face, and by the contemplation of His infinite beauty they are set on fire with a seraphic flame of love. This love transforms them into the beloved object, and by a wonderful union puts them in possession of God Himself, and consequently in possession of all His perfections. O thrice happy souls ! what can be wanting to complete their joy, when they have within and without them a vast ocean of felicity, with an absolute certainty that this felicity will be as lasting as an endless eternity ? It is this lasting, this unspeakable happiness, that I propose to your consideration, when I speak to you now of Heaven. This is the object of your faith. This is what you are to believe. In reality do you believe it ? *Credis hoc ?* as Christ our Lord said to Martha, when He spoke to her of the eternal life that follows the resurrection. And why may I not say in like manner to so many cold and insensible Christians of our days, who scarce ever raise up their thoughts to Heaven. Do you in reality believe that there is a Heaven ? Do you believe that all your happiness is centered in Heaven, and that nothing less than God Himself is to be your happiness, and the only delightful object that is to satiate all your desires ? But how can you be supposed to believe it, when you do nothing to acquire it ? How can you be supposed to believe it, whilst you do every thing to lose it ? From these two reflections it may be judged what your faith is. First, you do nothing for Heaven ; you do nothing for it in comparison of what sinners do to gratify their criminal passions. At least you do nothing for Heaven in comparison of what you yourselves do to preserve your corporal health, to recover out of a dangerous malady, to protract life for a few years, to establish a fortune for yourselves and your children, or to gain the affection and esteem of those who can be serviceable to you in promoting your temporal interest

In effect, does the business of your salvation take up much of your time ? Would you not judge a man certainly ruined in his temporal affairs who would be as careless and as indolent about them as you are

in the affair of eternity? And by applying so little to it, on **what** grounds can you promise to yourselves that the issue of it will be favorable to you? Have you the courage to take the same pains, to undergo the same fatigues for Heaven, that you take and undergo to please and shine in the world, to indulge your sensuality, to live at your ease, and enjoy your pleasures? Do you devote as much time, as much application to Heaven as you do to dress, to visiting, to gambling, and other amusements, which you look on as necessary to your station in life? A shameful comparison, indeed, which is sufficient to cover the cold and insensible Christian with confusion; and yet it is this that Solomon endeavors to imprint on our minds when He exhorts us to seek true wisdom with the same ardor that we seek gold and silver, and with the same labor that it costs worldings to acquire perishable treasures and to extract metals out of the bowels of the earth—Prov. ii. 4.

It is to this same emulation we are invited, when the Son of God exhorts us in the Gospel to manage the affair of salvation like unto merchants who are embarked in trade and traffic (Luke, xiv. 13), and when He places before our eyes the example of those workmen who labor in the vineyard at all hours of the day; and the example of the wise virgins, who are awake the whole night, expecting the arrival of their spouse (Matt. xxv.), and when St. Paul exhorts to watch the enemies of our souls like soldiers, always on guard, that so we may be constantly prepared to fight the battles of salvation with the arms of faith—Tim. vi. 11. All this clearly teaches us, that the desire of Heaven should have at least the same effect on us that the desire of gain, of pleasure, of honor, of fortune, of life, of health, has; and that the thoughts of Heaven alone should lead us to combat for it with so much the more fervor and alacrity, as the supreme, the sovereign good, is infinitely above all the goods and perishable treasures of this world.

Notwithstanding, what power have these thoughts over us, what effect do they produce in us? Alas! almost nothing to lead us to the practice of virtue, and next to nothing to sweeten the crosses and afflictions of this life. Speak of Heaven to a Christian in sorrow and affliction; tell him these are crowns of glory prepared for those who suffer here with patience and resignation; tell him that it is God who distributes all the crosses and afflictions in this world, as so many powerful means of our sanctification and salvation. This is a dry insipid language, incapable to touch his heart. But has he incurred the displeasure of a powerful protector, assure him of a speedy reconciliation; has he met

with temporal losses, announce to him a considerable fortune, unexpectedly fallen to him; does he weep for the death of a friend or relation, propose to him parties of pleasure and amusement, his grief and concern will soon abate, his usual calmness and serenity will speedily return. Thus he consoles himself in his misery and affliction by the prospect of those very things which may be to him the cause of new misery and misfortune, and he will not console himself with the hope of Heaven, and the prospect of a state exempt from every sort of misery, abounding with every kind of good, and which is nothing less than to see and enjoy his God for an endless eternity. You will say, perhaps, that you do not think of this. May I not reply that it is because you do not believe it? for how can you have a true belief of Heaven, and this belief not move you to do and to suffer what is necessary to acquire Heaven? How can you have a true belief of Heaven, and this belief suffer you to do every thing to lose Heaven, and by this loss to render yourselves irretrievably miserable for ever and ever?

In effect, how opposite is the life that most Christians lead to the faith which they pretend to profess? Had the Saviour of the world come down here on earth to announce a law favorable to the corrupt inclinations of flesh and blood; had He promised Heaven to cursers, swearers, drunkards, and blasphemers, and to such as would surpass the very pagans in criminal excesses, and in all the shameful vices of their fabulous deities; in order to conform to such injunctions, and obtain the benefit of such promises, would it be necessary, in such a supposition, to lead any other life than what we see the generality of those lead who bear the name of Christians? And yet it is, on the contrary, only to an absolute retrenchment of all these vices and criminal excesses, that our Blessed Saviour has attached a crown of immortal glory. How then can you be said to believe this, when you retrench nothing, when you abstain from nothing, but rather do every thing, and perpetuate every kind of sin, that can strip the unhappy offender of this crown of glory, and exclude him eternally from the kingdom of Heaven?

What answer can you give to St. Paul, who proposed to the Corinthians the example of those who formerly contended in the Isthmian games for the honor of victory? Did they not, says the Apostle, refrain themselves from all things? Instead of overcharging nature with superfluities, did they not refuse it almost the necessaries of life? Did they not sacrifice every sense of delight to the expectation of con-

quest? Did they not triumph over themselves, that they might triumph over their rivals? What then should we do, concludes the Apostle; we who are engaged in a more noble contest, we who run a race, not for the vain recompense of a fading garland of flowers, or the empty praises of biassed mortals, but for an incorruptible crown of glory in Heaven? If pagans were able to force nature to discipline and regularity, and to subdue its most impetuous sallies upon the feeble prospect of receiving a crown of vine branches, amidst the huzzas and applauses of an insignificant multitude, with what force can Christians remain indolent and inactive, when they have the grace of God for their assistant, and nothing less than Heaven itself for the prize of their victory? Can they have a true faith, a true belief for the important truths which the reasoning of St. Paul conveys, and still be cold and insensible for Heaven? Nay, what is more, can a true Christian hope be compatible with such coldness and insensibility? When we hope for, when we desire any considerable good, we show how impatient we are to enjoy it. We speak of it frequently, we entertain ourselves with pleasure on so agreeable a topic, we anticipate with a thousand wishes the real possession of it, and for this reason our Saviour says in the Gospel, *that where our treasure is, there is our heart*, that is to say, there our affections and desires centre. To be convinced of this truth you need but consult yourselves, and examine the emotions of your own hearts. Consider with what ardor, with what passion you seek the goods of this world. The privation of them, a delay which debars you of the possession of them, seems to you painful and afflicting. But we may say with St. Cyprian, that in regard to Heaven, cold and insensible Christians are prevaricators of their hope as well as of their faith. When you daily say in the Lord's Prayer, *thy kingdom come*, you ask of God that you may be so happy as to arrive at His eternal kingdom, and still you doat on the earth, the place of your exile. You conjure the Lord by your prayers, to hasten the day of your liberty, and still there is nothing you fear more than to quit this life, where you are but miserable captives. You look upon heaven as your native home, as the place of your future abode, and eternal residence, and yet the generality of mankind would willingly remain here always on earth, was there not an inevitable necessity for departing from it. Is not this to be prevaricators of your hope, because surely we do not fear what we hope for, we do not shun what we desire, we do not endeavor to escape what we passionately wish for? In vain, then, do you say that Heaven is the

object of your hopes, whilst you are cold and insensible in regard of it ; in vain do you pretend that Heaven is the object of your wishes, whilst there is nothing so afflicting to you as the apprehension of quitting this world, and whilst there is nothing you tremble at so much as the thoughts of death, without which you cannot expect to be put in possession of eternal happiness. Your coldness and insensibility for heaven plainly shows that you are void of true hope as well as of true faith ; nay, not only void of true faith and true hope, but also void of the true love of God. This is what should alarm you, my brethren, since whoever is void of the love of God is in a state of reprobation. Without the love of God all other Christian virtues, humility, probity, mortification, devotion, nay, martyrdom itself, would be unprofitable. This love does not consist in words, nor in a certain regular routine of vocal prayers, as some imagine ; but it consists in an actual and absolute preference of God to every thing that is not God, and consequently, to your goods, to your pleasures, to the world, to life, and even to yourselves. This being supposed, do you think that negligence, coldness, and insensibility for Heaven, are compatible with the love of God ? Can you believe that a Christian loves God, when he is not touched with concern in seeing himself separated from God, or when he does not desire to be reunited to God, or when he fears that moment which is to put him in possession of God ? Can this be called love, in the practice and language of the world ? What, my brethren, to love God ! shall this be to have no other emotions in the heart than those which you feel for objects about which you are quite indifferent ? Shall Christians flatter themselves that they love you, O my God, when they feel no desire to enjoy you, nor any regret for not enjoying you ? By no means. In this situation, far from being able to say with truth, *I love my God*, they have not begun to love Him, as St. Augustine remarks, in Ps. lxxxix. 11, because God has not in their hearts an absolute and entire preference above all the pleasures, goods, and comforts of this life. This appears evidently from their conduct. They are slaves of this world, eager in the pursuit of the conveniencies and advantages of this life, but entirely negligent of whatever concerns the life to come ; they are passionately fond of things which are either hurtful or unprofitable to them, and they interest themselves but little for what is of infinite consequence to them, and for which they should be perpetually in action, perpetually in motion, perpetually in alarms ; nay, to consider their coldness and insensibility for Heaven, one might infer that their

God, of all things, has the least share in their esteem and affection, and that a happy eternity is to them, of all objects, the most indifferent. May I not then conclude, that such Christians live without faith, without hope, and without charity, or the love of God? O deplorable coldness and insensibility, that hurries on thousands to everlasting misery! But what are the means to overcome this coldness and insensibility? This is the subject of the second point, which I will reduce briefly to a few words.

To overcome your coldness and insensibility for Heaven, you are to meditate on this blessed mansion of glory and on the happiness of seeing and enjoying God there for all eternity. To this meditation you are to add the consideration of what all the saints have done and suffered, in order to purchase for themselves this unspeakable bliss. These considerations, sinking deeply in your mind, with the blessing of God, will animate you to labor fervently and constantly for the same end. This is what employed the thoughts of the saints whilst here on earth, and inspired them with so much contempt and indifference for the painted toys, empty bubbles, alluring pleasures, delusive charms, and perishable goods of this world; this is what made them labor so much, do so much, and suffer so much in this life, to insure for themselves the incomprehensible joys and permanent happiness of the kingdom of Heaven. They kept all the commandments; they observed the counsels and maxims of the Gospel; they fulfilled every duty toward God, toward themselves, and toward their neighbor. In the midst of riches they preserved a spirit of evangelical poverty; in the midst of grandeur they preserved a spirit of humility; in the midst of the world they preserved a spirit of retreat; and in the midst of all the advantages and conveniences of life, a spirit of penance and mortification. They carried their zeal still farther, or if you will, their zeal carried far greater lengths. If we pass over to the deserts of Egypt, and consider the lives of the famous solitaries of Thebais, we shall behold them shut up in the inclosures of rocks, of grottoes, and caverns, always watching, always fasting, always praying, always meditating, and resembling angels rather than mortal men; nay, after fifty or sixty years of solitude, spent thus in the service of God, and in the constant practice of self-denial and mortification, they looked upon themselves as unprofitable servants to whom no reward was due. After all they had done they were humbled in their own eyes, and so far from being elated with any presumption or self-complacency, that they judged themselves unworthy

to be admitted into the mansions of eternal bliss, or to obtain even the lowest place amongst the elect, because they counted only on the great mercy of God, who, in crowning the merits of His servants, crowns the favors and gifts which He Himself liberally heaps on them, as St. Augustine speaks. What shall I say of the holy martyrs and glorious combatants of the militant Church, who gave their blood, and suffered death in testimony of their faith, and in the cause of virtue? What excruciating tortures did not the barbarity of tyrants invent to torment them? Yet the hope of reigning eternally with Jesus Christ in the glory of Heaven sweetened the bitter chalice of all their sufferings, and made death, even in its most terrifying shape, appear acceptable to them. *Expecting the blessed hope, and the coming of the great God*, as the Scripture says, they contended to enter in at the narrow gate, and to carry the kingdom of Heaven by a holy violence to nature. Their example should excite you to labor with assiduity, fervor, and perseverance for the acquisition of the same happiness which they now enjoy, and for which you have been created. It is your interest as well as your duty to exert yourselves with uncommon zeal in a business of such importance. You should have it more at heart than any thing in this world, and be ready to sacrifice whatever is dearest to you on earth, rather than sacrifice your souls, and lose Heaven for a never-ending eternity. Many of you, my brethren, are now, perhaps, at the eve of your death, and shortly to be summoned before the tribunal of the living God, there to give an account of twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years of your life, employed in every other affair but that of your salvation. What good works have you done? What provision have you made to insure Heaven for your souls? What penance have you done to expiate the sins whereby you have defiled the white robe of your baptismal innocence? What restitution have you made to your neighbor for his property, which you have unjustly acquired, and which you as unjustly possess? What reparation have you made of the characters which you have blackened and injured? What steps have you taken to remove the scandal which you have given by your bad example? Be not deceived, my dear brethren; these duties must necessarily be complied with, and you are not only to *avoid evil*, but also to *do good*, in order to be entitled to admission into the kingdom of Heaven, into which, according to the Sacred Scripture, *nothing that is defiled can enter*. Look upon us, O Lord, we beseech Thee, with the eyes of pity, and excite in us a penitential abhorrence of our past errors and neg-

lects ; grant that we may henceforth seek, first, the kingdom of Heaven, and make it the principal object of our desires, the centre of our wishes, and the grand subject of our labors and pursuits. Give us grace to love Thee sincerely, to serve Thee faithfully, and to look upon it as our only happiness to be for ever united to Thee, in the sacred mansions of the heavenly Jerusalem, which Thou hast prepared for Thy faithful servants, and which I heartily wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT.

ON THE NECESSITY AND QUALITIES OF SACRAMENTAL CONFESSION.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

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| I. The dumb devil. | III. Penitence of the heart. |
| II. Gospel proofs of sacramental confession | IV. True repentance. |
| | V. Peroration. |

Erat Jesus ejiciens dæmonium, et illud erat mutum.—St. Luc. c. xi. v. 14.
Jesus was casting out a devil, and it was dumb.—St. Luke, c. xi. v. 14.

THE person possessed of a dumb devil, mentioned in this day's Gospel, was an emblem of those unhappy sinners who are silent when the honor and glory of God, the edification of their neighbor, and the welfare of their own souls call on them to speak out, and to make a Christian use of the gift of speech. He was a figure of those who choose to continue dumb miserable slaves under the tyrannical yoke of Satan, rather than open their mouths to sue for the divine mercy by a true repentance, and to give ease to their own conscience, by an humble and candid confession of their sins. They may with propriety be truly accounted dumb, in a moral sense, who neglect and refuse to employ their tongues for this salutary purpose, or who dissemble, hide, and conceal, through a false modesty, at the sacred tribunal, what they were neither afraid nor ashamed to commit in the presence of the all-seeing God. In such cases, sinners may be said to be spiritually possessed of a dumb devil, who ties up their tongues, that the hands of God's mercy may be for ever shut against them, and who persuades them either to abandon the Sacrament of Penance entirely, or to profane it sacrile-

giously by imperfect and defective confessions, that he may have a more favorable opportunity to fortify himself strongly in their souls, and establish a kind of dominion over them. Convinced of the manifold advantages of a true and sincere confession, he is ever industrious to withdraw sinners from it, and to render them more averse to the remedy than to the disease ; he fills them with confidence to sin and shame to confess. Thus it is, says John Chrysostom, that the devil inverts the order established by Almighty God, which is, that we would be ashamed to commit sin, and that we should glory in confessing our sins ; but the sworn enemy of our souls usually robs sinners of all shame, and makes them throw off all fear when he tempts them to sin. On the contrary, when the sin is once accomplished, he returns upon them with a new snare, and makes them restitution of their shame, in order to engage them in the desperate resolution, either of neglecting sacramental confession, the only sanctuary they have left to secure their salvation, or of playing the hypocrite, in pretending to be religiously devout, at the very time they are sacrilegiously wicked. To caution you against such dreadful evils, and to dispose you the better for complying with your Easter duty in a Christian religious manner, is the design of the following discourse. In the first part, I will show you the indispensable necessity of sacramental confession, and the manner in which you are to prepare yourselves for it. In the second part I will point out to you the dispositions which must necessarily accompany sacramental confession, in order to render it acceptable to God and available to the repenting sinner. In short, the nature and conditions of a good sacramental confession shall be the entire subject of the following discourse, and of your favorable attention ; no subject being more suitable to this penitential season, or more deserving of your particular notice, as your happy reconciliation with your offended Creator depends on a religious compliance with this important obligation at this holy time. Let us previously invoke the aid of Heaven, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, &c. *Ave Maria.*

To be convinced of the necessity of sacramental confession for such as have violated the laws of the Gospel, forfeited their baptismal innocence, and relapsed into the bondage of Satan, after having been washed and purified by the precious blood of the Lamb of God, we need but consider attentively the commission which our Divine Redeemer gave His Apostles, and their lawful successors in the ministry. It is evident from the sixteenth and eighteenth chapters of St. Matthew, and from

the twentieth chapter of St. John, that He fulfilled His promise of giving them the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, and that He imparted to them an unlimited power to bind and loose, to forgive and retain sins, with a solemn declaration that whatsoever they would bind or loose on earth, should be bound or loosed in heaven, and that whosoever sins they would forgive or retain on earth, should likewise be forgiven or retained in heaven. He therefore laid an indispensable obligation on the faithful to confess their sins, in order to have them remitted or retained ; and, of course, sacramental confession in the tribunal of Penance is a divine institution, and a positive injunction of Jesus Christ ; for unless the faithful were positively enjoined in the performance of this humiliating and painful duty, the pastors of the Church could not possibly execute the commission intrusted to them, nor exercise the power with which they are invested ; they could not come to the knowledge of the cause on which they are to decide, nor be able to judge what sins are to be forgiven, what sins are to be retained ; they would not be able to distinguish between leprosy and leprosy, nor to pronounce just sentence, nor to prescribe suitable remedies and preservatives against sin, nor to give the necessary and proper advice to sinners, unless they were to be acquainted previously with the true state of their conscience by their confession. In short, the keys of the kingdom of Heaven would be useless, and the commission they received would be nugatory, as St. Augustine justly observes in his 49th Homily, where he says : To pretend that it is sufficient to confess to God alone, is to destroy the commission of Christ, to contradict the Gospel, and to make void the power of the keys which were given to the Church ; wherefore the holy doctor concludes (Lib. de Visit. Infirm.), with these remarkable words : *If thou wilt have heaven open to thee, open thy mouth in confession to the priest.* It is manifest from the concurring testimonies of the other ancient fathers and writers, both of the Latin and Greek Church, that sacramental confession has been practiced by the faithful in all ages of the known world, and in every age since the first establishment of Christianity, which is a clear proof that they were thoroughly convinced of its being a divine institution ; for otherwise mankind would never have submitted to a law that is so mortifying to human pride. The same law that obliges a Christian to confess his sins, obliges him also to examine his conscience, to take a serious view of the state of his soul, and to use a moral diligence in discovering or finding out what sins he has been guilty of, in thought, word, deed, and omission ; because otherwise he

cannot make an exact and faithful confession of them. In an affair of such consequence it is necessary to proceed with cool and deliberate attention, and with as much circumspection and composure of mind as reason and prudence require that a person should proceed with in other matters of great importance. It is not sufficient to take a superficial and cursory view of the outward, gross and palpable crimes which stare the sinner in the face, and which are observable to every eye ; but the inward spiritual sins, which pride and self-love, human respect, and worldly interest are most solicitous to hide and keep undiscovered, should be narrowly inspected, because they are often more dangerous, and inflict a deeper wound on the soul, as the Council of Trent remarks (Sess. 14, c. 5), than the notorious and scandalous sins which are openly committed. The secret recesses and folds of the heart must be looked into and closely searched, and the wounds of the soul must be probed to the bottom, in order to dislodge the corruption and venom that lurk within. The ax is to be laid to the root, and the spring and source of every sinful disorder is to be investigated. The principles and motives upon which a person has acted must be carefully weighed, and an impartial inquiry is to be made into our thoughts and desires, intentions and corrupt inclinations, evil habits and customary failings, darling passions and favorite vices. Unless a diligent self-examination of this sort be made, we will be apt to be always a mystery to ourselves, and strangers to the real state of our souls ; for to be blind to our own faults, and to be misled, seduced, and deceived in the judgment we form of ourselves and of our actions, is one of the pernicious consequences and deepest wounds of original sin. We are, indeed, quick-sighted enough to observe the failings of others, and, as the Scripture expresses it, to discern a mote in the eye of our neighbor, at the same time that we do not perceive the beam in our own eye. We overlook our own follies, and behold every thing that regards ourselves through a fallacious medium, or a kind of perspective, which either magnifies or diminishes the object. Self-love flatters us, presumption deludes us, and our passions raise a mist before the eye of reason, that often clouds and darkens the understanding. These clouds must be dispelled, this interior blindness must be removed and remedied by diligent self-examination, and by humbly and fervently beseeching the Holy Ghost to enlighten our darkness, to open our eyes, and to remove the veil that hides us from ourselves.

A constant watchfulness over all the motions of our hearts, and over

our thoughts, words, and actions, as far as is compatible with human frailty, and a daily examination of conscience in the evening, when the hurry of business is over, are the most effectual means to make us know and become familiar with ourselves; they also contribute in a great measure to facilitate the scrutiny which is necessary to be made before sacramental confession. The Ten Commandments of God, the maxims of the Gospel, the precepts of the Church, the virtues and duties of a Christian life in general, and the particular obligations of our respective states and departments in social life, are the rule and standard we are to be guided by in our examination, and not by the false maxims, or prevailing customs and fashions of the world. We should allow ourselves sufficient time and leisure to dive into the secrets of our conscience, and to consider what places, what persons, what companies we have frequented; in what conversations, actions, and occupations we have passed the time; in what particulars we have deviated from rectitude; in what manner we have discharged or violated the duties which we owe to God, to our neighbor, and to ourselves, that we may be able to lay all our sins at the feet of Jesus Christ, with the number, as near as can be recollected, and the circumstances, which alter the nature of the sin, or notably aggravate the guilt; for it is an illusion to imagine that after several months, or perhaps years spent in the circle of pleasures and diversions, dissipation and distraction, irregularity and disorder, a person can in a short time become well acquainted with the true state of his interior, or be duly prepared to render a proper account of all his offenses. In effect, there is reason to apprehend that the confessions of many Christians of this description are defective and imperfect, if not null and void, for want of premising a diligent self-examination, and making a regular preparation. How frequently do they run over the transactions of several months, nay, of several years, in the space of time that would not suffice for confessing the sins of a single day? How often do they seem at a loss even for sufficient matter for the sacramental absolution, at the very time that they would discover themselves to be in a very alarming situation, did they but take the trouble of making a close inquiry into the true state of their souls? To pass over in silence many other defects and abuses, which should be carefully avoided in the sacred tribunal, some, instead of accusing themselves with candor, sincerity and humility, endeavor to extenuate their crimes with studied excuses and artful palliations. Others confess their sins like Adam and Eve, by accusing their neighbor, and throwing the fault on

others, saying one time that it was owing to the peevish humor and temper of a cross, passionate wife, the debauchery and drunkenness of a wicked, turbulent husband, the disobedience of an headstrong, incorrigible child, the roguery of a thieving servant, the injustice of a cruel master, the unreasonableness and severity of a bad mistress. Another time they allege some other cause, such as anger, passion, company, distress, fear, shame, necessity, or the like. Others, in fine, are only solicitous about the integrity of their confession, and rest satisfied when they confess what occurs to their memory, and receive absolution ; but they should remember, that there are other conditions required on the part of a true gospel penitent besides the integrity of confession. He should neither be hurried on by a talkative spirit, nor tongue-tied by a dumb spirit, like the poor man mentioned in this day's Gospel. He should not accuse others but himself ; he should not act with disguise or dissimulation, but with candor and sincerity, since, as the Holy Ghost says (Proverbs, xxviii. 13) : *He that hideth his sins shall not prosper, but he that shall confess, and forsake them, shall obtain mercy.* In short, his confession must be simple, humble, plain, true, faithful, full, entire, and accompanied with an inward grief of the heart, a hatred of sin, and a firm purpose of amendment, this being the very soul and essence of repentance, as I will show you in the second point. The compunction or sorrow of the heart, which constitutes a true conversion, is usually called *contrition*, which word originally signifies a bruising, or breaking of a thing in pieces, and it is metaphorically used to denote the grief with which the heart of a sincere penitent is pierced, and, as it were, broken and rent asunder on account of his sins and offenses against the Lord his God. This inward sorrow is so essential an ingredient of a sincere repentance, that the most complete confession will not purify the soul of a sinner, if his heart be not concerned, and grieved, and does not detest sin. It is the heart that is the seat of repentance, as it is the seat of love. It must weep over its own wretchedness, perfidy, and ingratitude. It must hate and detest sin, because it is offensive and displeasing to God's infinite goodness. It must love God, and value His friendship in preference to every thing in the world ; for as there are two great evils included in every mortal sin, repentance, which is the opposite, and the destroyer of sin, must also have two opposite conditions. The two great evils included in mortal sin, are described thus by the Almighty (c. ii. 13, of the Prophet Jeremias) : *My people, says the Lord, have done two evils. They have forsaken me, the foun-*

tain of living water, and have dug to themselves broken cisterns, that can hold no water. The first of these evils is, the averting, or turning away the heart from the Creator, and the very fountain of all goodness. The second evil is, the conversion of the heart to the creature, and embracing the foul monster, mortal sin, which is justly compared to a broken cistern, that can hold no water, and is a receptacle only of filth and mud. As the heart, therefore, of the sinner is, by sin, carried away from God, and bestowed on created objects, through a misplaced affection, it is necessary that the heart be truly changed by repentance, and effectually averted from sin, and from the irregular love of the creature. Secondly, it must be converted to the Creator, and embrace Him as the fountain of justice. And as it is a blind, inordinate love that carries away the heart of the sinner from God, it is a holy regular love that must bring back the heart, and return it again to God, which made St. Augustine say (Serm. 7, de temp.), that *nothing renders a repentance certain but the love of God, and a hatred of sin.*

The fear of hell is, indeed, a useful curb to the impetuosity of the passions, and in the beginning a necessary spur to urge sinners on to their duty. It is a preparation for repentance; but of itself alone it is insufficient to banish the love of sin from the heart, because it implies no hatred of sin precisely for its own account, and as it is an offense of God, but merely in regard of the punishment that attends it. It alarms and frightens a sinner to relinquish his sinful disorders much after the same manner that the imminent danger and apprehension of a shipwreck makes a merchant cast his merchandise into the sea, though at the same time he retains his former affection to it, and is resolved to fish it up again when the storm is over. Hence St. Augustine says, that the sinner who leaves off sinning for the fear of hell fire only, is not afraid to sin, but afraid to burn; and if he hates sin, it is not for the sake of God whom it offends, but it is for his own sake, or through some selfish consideration, because he apprehends it to be ruinous to his own interest, and prejudicial to his own happiness, or because it opens a horrid scene of misery before his eyes, and menaces him with unquenchable flames. Far from acting like an affectionate child upon a principle of love and gratitude, he only acts like a mercenary slave, upon a principle of sordid fear, which may indeed withhold his hands from doing a criminal action, but does not change his will or affection. Hence it is that his sorrow for sin often amounts to no more than a wish that he could sin with impunity, and for this reason he is ready to consent to any sin that is

thought to be only venial, because he believes it will not make him liable to eternal punishment, whilst the offense given to God is a matter he totally disregards.

It is to be dreaded that many sinners deceive themselves in this point, and approach the sacred tribunal without being actuated with that true sorrow of heart, that holy indignation against themselves, and that penitential abhorrence of sin, which is the very soul of repentance. This is what they should chiefly aim at, and take most pains to acquire, when they are disposing themselves for receiving the sacraments of reconciliation ; but, unhappily, several neglect what is most essential, and come only half prepared. They persuade themselves that they are penitent, provided they perform certain exterior exercises of penance, recite some devout forms of prayer, and vent a few sighs, moans, and tears, which a lively apprehension, a violent fear, a sensible tenderness of complexion, may naturally force from them, without working any real conversion or change in their hearts. How often, alas ! are the feelings of nature, the workings of pride and self-love, the agitations of a false shame, and confusion, the anxiety and trouble, that proceed merely from human respect and servile fear, mistaken for the substance and essence of a true repentance.

The contrition that qualifies the repentant sinner for the happy remission of his sins, is an emotion excited by grace, and proceeding from the operation of the spirit of God. It is *interior* and *supernatural*. It is grounded on motives of faith and religion. It springs from the love of God, which alone is able to banish the love of sin from the heart ; for which reason St. John says, *He that loveth not, abideth in death*—1 Ep. iii. 14. It is *universal*—that is, it extends itself without exception to every mortal sin a person is guilty of. It is also the *supreme* and *sovereign* sorrow of the heart and will—that is to say, it is in reality greater than and above all sorrows ; for as sin is the greatest of all evils, it must be hated and abhorred more than any other evil, and we are to be penetrated with a greater grief, and to have more real concern, at least in spirit, and in the superior and rational part of our souls, for the offense given to God, and for the loss of His grace and friendship by sin, than by any other evil or misfortune, or for the loss of whatever else is dearest and nearest to us in the whole world. It is another property of true contrition, to include essentially a firm purpose of amendment, with a will and desire to satisfy God's justice, by leading a new life, and bringing forth the worthy fruits of repentance, this being

the grand criterion by which a true judgment may be formed of its sincerity. By the firm purpose of amendment, that springs from contrition, I mean a fixed resolution, and a full determination of the will never more to offend God by mortal sin, but to atone for the past offenses, to repair the injuries done others in their property or character. and to shun the places, the companies, and the objects, which were the cause of a person's spiritual ruin and downfall, with all other dangerous and immediate occasions of sin, though they should be as dear to him as the very apple of his eye.

Behold, my brethren, the nature and qualities of that contrition with which your confession ought to be accompanied, and which you should use your utmost endeavors to procure, by putting up for this end your humble and fervent prayers to Him who holds in His hands the hearts of men, and who alone is able to change their dispositions, and make them hate what they pursued before with the most ardent affections. And since the Gospel assures us that whatever we ask the Eternal Father in the name of His beloved Son Jesus, shall be given to us we should earnestly beseech Him to grant us the great gift of a hearty contrition, in the name and through the infinite merits of Jesus Christ. We may be gradually led on and helped to the attainment of it by warming our hearts with fervent acts of faith, hope, and charity, and by meditating attentively on the most powerful motives for exciting contrition : such as the frightful enormity, base ingratitude, and crying malice of mortal sin ; the dreadful torments which are due to it ; the infinite goodness of God, whom it offends ; the passion of Jesus Christ, which it renews ; the incomprehensible joys of Heaven, from which it excludes the unhappy sinner for a never-ending eternity, &c. These great truths, well digested and ruminated with leisure and attention, and the pious affections which they are apt to inspire, will help to melt the heart into compunction, and to kindle in it a pure love of God. When you are thus prepared and penetrated with these sentiments, you are to approach the sacred tribunal as if you were going to the foot of the cross, with an humble confidence in the boundless mercy of God, that the precious blood which streamed down from the feet of Jesus on Mount Calvary will wash away all your iniquities. No childish fear or false shame should prevail on you to tell a sacrilegious lie to the Holy Ghost, like Ananias and Saphira, who were therefore struck dead at the feet of St. Peter—Acts, v. 3, 7. Rather copy after the humble publican, or the prodigal child returning to the embraces of his affectionate father, or

the penitent Magdalen prostrate at the feet of her Divine Redeemer, and bathing them with her tears. A momentary confusion, a short humiliation before the minister of God, who holds the place of Jesus Christ in the sacred tribunal, will deliver you from the stings and remorse which, like so many thorns, torture your souls, and will be succeeded by interior peace, joy, and consolation. The greater your crimes are the greater will be the joy of the whole court of Heaven to see your conversion to God, testified by a good confession, since, as the Gospel assures us, there is more joy among the Angels of Heaven for one sinner that does penance than for ninety-nine just who do not stand in need of it. How much, therefore, my brethren, are we indebted to the goodness of the Lord for having provided us with so powerful a remedy for healing all our spiritual disorders, and so effectual a means of recovering His love and friendship? Let us not receive His divine grace in vain, but let us cheerfully submit to all the humiliations of penance, and return thanks to our merciful Lord for putting it in our power to purchase our pardon upon such easy terms. O sweetest Jesus, give us grace, we beseech Thee, to approach Thy sacred tribunal with the necessary dispositions, and to partake of the wonderful effects of Thy infinite bounty. We bless and praise Thy holy name for having spared us so long, and for giving us still time to repent, instead of casting us off in the midst of our sins, as we deserved. By the same mercy we pray Thee to grant us a true and sincere contrition, that we may lament our past sins in the bitterness of our souls. Mollify our rocky hearts, and strike them as Moses struck the rock in the desert, that waters of penance and tears of compunction may flow from us in abundance, and wash away all our iniquities. In Thee we place all our confidence, and through Thy merits we hope to be ranked on the last day in the happy number of those who are to be invited by Thee to take possession of the kingdom of Thy glory for all eternity. Which I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT.

ON THE SIGNAL ADVANTAGES AND BENEFITS OF A
FREQUENT AND WORTHY COMMUNION.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. The multiplication of loaves.
- II. Real belief in the Blessed Eucharist.
- III. The comforts of true faith in the Blessed Eucharist.
- IV. The Blessed Eucharist necessary as food for the soul.
- V. Peroration.

Acceptit Jesus panes, et cum gratias egisset, distribuit discumbentibus.

St. Jo. c. vi. v. 11.

Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them.

St. John, c. vi. v. 11.

THE subject of this Sunday's Gospel is an illustrious miracle wrought by our Divine Redeemer in favor of a vast multitude of people, which had followed Him into the desert, with an ardent desire of hearing His heavenly doctrine, and seeing the prodigies He was constantly working for the sick and infirm, who had recourse to Him for relief, and stood in need of His assistance. Their piety and zeal for the glory of God, and for the eternal welfare of their souls, made them forget their corporal necessities and neglect to carry provisions with them; but their neglect was amply supplied by the paternal providence of the Lord, who seldom fails to manage our temporal interest, and to provide abundantly for the subsistence of our bodies, when we take proper care of our souls and apply ourselves seriously to the grand affair of our eternal salvation. He has engaged His sacred word, and solemnly promised that He will not only reward us with supernatural happiness hereafter, but also crown our undertakings with temporal blessings in this life, if we seek first His honor and glory, and make the eternal salvation of our souls our chief business and principal study. *Be not solicitous, therefore, (says He, Matt. vi. 31, 33,) saying, what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewith shall we be clothed? Seek ye, therefore, first the kingdom of God, and his justice, and all these things shall be added unto you.*

The crowds of people which, according to this day's Gospel, flocked from all sides to hear the Word of God, and exposed themselves to the

danger of starving in a desert, in order to nourish their souls, with the spiritual food of eternal life, furnish us with a remarkable instance of this truth ; for no sooner did our Blessed Saviour lift up His eyes and behold them from the top of a mountain, whereon He stood with His disciples, but His affectionate heart was touched with compassion, and moved to work a great miracle in their behalf. He took into His sacred hands five small loaves which happened to be brought to Him, and He blessed and multiplied them by His all-powerful words in so wonderful a manner, that twelve baskets were filled with the fragments which remained, after the whole multitude, that amounted to about five thousand persons, as the Evangelist tells us, had been satiated, and had eaten plentifully thereof. This famous miracle was a type and figure of the miracle of miracles, as St. Thomas of Aquin calls it, which our Divine Redeemer wrought afterward at His last supper, when by His almighty power he changed the substance of bread and wine into the heavenly banquet of His own precious body and blood, and bequeathed this inestimable legacy to His Church, for the refecton and nourishment of the souls of the faithful unto the end of the world. We all eat of this banquet, and still it is not diminished ; we all partake of it, and still it remains whole and entire ; one eats of it, and a thousand eat of it, and still this one receives Christ whole and entire, and the thousand do no more. Behold the stupendous prodigy that is wrought in your favor, and at the same time admire with gratitude the wonderful difference between the food granted to you, and the food that was granted to the pious multitude mentioned in the Gospel. Jesus provided with a boundless liberality for their corporal wants ; He fed them with an earthly, material food ; He feeds you with a celestial divine food. Not content with sacrificing His flesh and spilling His blood for your sake on Mount Calvary, He vouchsafes to nourish your souls, like the affectionate pelican, with His own sacred body and blood in the venerable sacrament of the Eucharist. To encourage the devout and fervent Christian to have frequent recourse to this sacrament, and to awake and rouse the luke-warm and slothful, I intend, with the divine assistance, to lay before you the signal advantages and happy effects of a worthy and frequent communion, and then to point out the great prejudice they do to their own souls, and the dreadful evils they expose themselves to, who for any considerable length of time neglect this Christian duty. Let us first implore the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, &c. *Ave Maria.*

As this discourse is merely calculated for the edification of those who glory in adhering strictly to the ancient faith of the primitive Church, which has been carefully handed down from the days of the Apostles to our days by an uninterrupted succession of upward of eighteen hundred years, and which has been uniformly professed by the Cyrils, the Basils, the Chrysostoms, the Ambroses, the Augustines, the Gregories, and all the great luminaries of venerable antiquity, it appears unnecessary at present to take up your time, and engage your attention, with a long enumeration of the various arguments by which the Catholic doctrine concerning the mystery of the blessed Eucharist is invincibly proved against all unbelievers. You believe, my brethren, upon the infallible authority of the Word of God, that the body of Jesus Christ, which was immolated on the altar of the cross for our sake, and the blood which was shed for the remission of our sins, are really present in this adorable sacrament, and inseparably united to his soul and divinity. This you believe as Christians and Catholics, but it is the misfortune of several amongst you to believe this mystery, as they do other mysteries of our holy religion, with a speculative and superficial faith only, which has but little influence on their conduct, so that the gracious condescension of our Divine Redeemer in accommodating Himself to our weakness, and giving Himself to us to be the food of our souls, instead of inflaming our love for Him, and increasing our devotion, is but too frequently repaid with inattention and indifference, if not with a total neglect of this great sacrament of His love; yet it must be acknowledged, that the more He has humbled Himself here for our sake, by divesting himself, in a manner, of the splendor of His majesty, and veiling the dazzling rays of His glory under the poor elements or appearances of bread and wine, the more we are indebted to Him, the dearer He should be to us, the more fervent we should be in His service, and the more assiduous in testifying our gratitude, respect, and veneration for Him.

Our belief of His real presence in this sacrament ought to enkindle in our hearts the most ardent desires of frequently uniting ourselves to Him in it by a devout communion. He instituted it in the form of a banquet, under two distinct species, to give us thereby to understand, as St. Augustine remarks, that He intended it should be frequented by the faithful, and should serve as a continual banquet in the Church, to nourish and support the spiritual life of our souls, as corporal food serves to nourish and support the life of the body. Hence He invites us all to

partake of this banquet, and assures us in ch. vi. of St. John, v. 54, that unless we have recourse to it we shall have no life in us: *Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you.* On the contrary, he expressly says, in the same sixth chapter of St. John, *He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up in the last day, and he shall live for ever.* Must we not then be regardless of our own spiritual welfare if we slight this most valuable gift of Heaven? Or can we be supposed to have any great love or esteem for Jesus Christ, if instead of corresponding with His love, we refuse to accept of His affectionate invitation, and neglect to approach His sacred table with suitable piety and devotion? What greater comfort, what greater felicity can we enjoy in this vale of tears and place of exile, than to partake from time to time of this divine food, this heavenly manna, this spiritual bread of eternal life.

Of all the spiritual exercises that religion commands, this is the most comfortable and the most salutary; it is in the sacred communion that spiritual sweetness is tasted in its very source, as St. Thomas of Aquin speaks; here the afflicted and sorrowful find a comforter ready at all hours to console them, and to alleviate their grievances; here the distressed find a compassionate Father always ready to succor and relieve them; here the sick and infirm find an omnipotent physician, ready and willing to heal and strengthen them; here the needy and indigent meet a most bountiful benefactor and a tender-hearted friend, ready to receive their petitions, and to grant their requests; here, in short, the faithful in general find a resource in all their necessities, a sanctuary in all their dangers, a remedy in all their infirmities, a consolation and protection in all their wants and tribulations. If the children of Israel were protected and secured against the exterminating angel, by sprinkling the blood of the Paschal Lamb on the doors of their houses; and if Obededom and his family obtained so many signal blessings and favors from Heaven for lodging the Ark of the Covenant in his house, what may we not expect, by receiving and lodging Christ Himself in person in the temple of our souls, by a worthy and devout communion? We read in the Gospel that Zacheus, the publican, was promised salvation for lodging our Blessed Saviour under the roof of his house; a woman afflicted with a tedious disorder, was cured by only touching the hem of His garment; and the disciples, on their way to the castle of Emmaus, were so sensibly affected by His company and conversation, that they

felt their hearts inflamed and burning within them with the fire of divine love. Judge, then, what signal graces, favors, and blessings, must flow from the very source of sanctity and the fountain of all grace into the soul of a devout Christian, which by a good communion is occupied, possessed, and intimately united to the Son of God, and in which he dwells with his whole divinity and humanity. The bread which the angel of the Lord ordered the Prophet Elias to eat in the desert enabled him to pursue his journey till he arrived with safety at the mountain of Horeb. In like manner the spiritual bread and divine banquet which the Lord Himself invites us to partake of in the holy communion nourishes and supports the supernatural life of grace in the soul ; it cherishes and invigorates its virtue, enlivens its piety, and enables it to advance daily in the paths of holiness, until it arrives at length at the very summit of Christian perfection. Nothing, says St. John Chrysostom, renders Christians more formidable to the powers of hell than a worthy and frequent communion of the body and blood of Jesus Christ ; nothing contributes more effectually to put the devil to flight, to weaken concupiscence, to extinguish the fire of lust in the heart, and to imprint a character of purity in the soul. It is a sovereign preservative against mortal sin, and a powerful antidote against venial sins and daily imperfections, as the Council of Trent teaches. It is a shield that repels all the fiery darts of Satan, and an armor that enables a Christian to withstand his most violent assaults and temptations. The happy fruits and blessed effects of frequent and devout communion appeared visibly in the conduct of the primitive Christians ; purity of morals and sanctity of life reigned among them. Coming daily from the communion table, they were courageous, like lions, as St. John Chrysostom speaks ; they breathed flames of charity, and ran to martyrdom with as much alacrity as if they were hastening to a triumph. There was no necessity then, as there is now, for a precept to urge and oblige the faithful to approach the holy communion ; they wanted a curb to keep in their devotion, rather than a spur to enliven it. Nothing could give them greater concern than to be deprived of this divine food, as St. John Chrysostom says. Hence we read in Church history, that when any of them happened to be separated and kept at a distance from the table of the Lord until they were better prepared, or till they performed the penance prescribed by the rigorous discipline of the times, they regretted nothing more bitterly, and deemed no punishment more severe, no misfortune more deplorable. For this reason they were accustomed to

implore the mediation of the holy martyrs and confessors, that the time of their penance might be shortened, and to prostrate themselves often at the feet of the pastors of the Church with tears in their eyes, like Esau, when he sued for the blessing of his father Isaac, humbly praying to be admitted to the sacrament of reconciliation, and to the blessed communion of the body and blood of the Lord, without further delay.

Such was the fervor and devotion of the faithful in the primitive ages of Christianity ; but alas ! in process of time, piety beginning to decrease, and charity growing cold, the use of the blessed sacrament became less frequent amongst the generality of their successors. Whilst some religious souls continued still to live up to the zeal of their pious ancestors, and made it their rule to communicate every day, the greater number degenerated from it, and was content at first with weekly communion on every Sunday, and afterward with quarterly communion on the principal solemnities of the year. One would be apt to imagine that the Church should never have an occasion to exert her authority, and denounce her censures, unless to prevent and deter the wicked from approaching this heavenly banquet unworthily ; but the faithful, for the most part, became gradually so lukewarm and so careless in frequenting it, that the general Council of Lateran at length found it necessary to issue a formal precept, in order to fix and determine some particular time for them to obey the divine command, lest if they were left to themselves they should entirely neglect so important a duty. The holy time of Easter was assigned and appointed, in particular, as the fittest in the whole year for this purpose, the anniversary of the primitive institution of the blessed Eucharist recurring about that time. However, the intention of the Church in thus commanding yearly communion, at or about the solemnity of Easter, is not to authorize the sloth and indolence, or to approve the conduct of such of her children as content themselves with communicating once in a year, but only to hinder them from deferring it any longer. It cannot then be inferred from hence, that annual communion is sufficient to satisfy the duty of a Christian, or to correspond with the views and intention of our Divine Redeemer, in leaving us this heavenly banquet. No, my brethren, the ecclesiastical precept indeed is thereby complied with, provided the communicant receives once a year, with the proper dispositions, at the time and place appointed ; but to live up to the spirit of the Christian religion, and to comply with the advice and wishes of the Church, it is necessary to

communicate more frequently. Hence it is that the holy Council of Trent, in its 22d Session, expresses an ardent desire that all the faithful were in a state to receive the blessed Eucharist, not only spiritually but sacramentally, every time that they assist at the august sacrifice of the mass. Hence it is also that so many indulgences are granted in the course of the year for their greater encouragement, and that spiritual writers so warmly recommend frequent communion, particularly on all the great solemnities, and on every Sunday, especially on the Sundays of Lent and Advent, and even oftener, according to the fruits it produces and the improvement that is made in virtue, by such as are free from all affection to sin. St. Francis of Sales lays it down as a general rule, for people living in the commerce of the world, they ought to communicate regularly, at least once a month, and on the principal festivals of the year, if they intend to lead a Christian life. As for these Christians who, in open violation of the law of God, and His Church, absent themselves willingly, whole years together from communion, they must acknowledge, if they have not lost their faith along with their piety and devotion, that by turning their backs in this manner to the principal means of grace, and by treating the most holy of the seven sacraments with such inattention, indifference and disrespect, they not only rob their own souls of many special graces, favors and blessings, which otherwise they would receive, but they also make a most ungrateful and irreligious return to Jesus Christ for His inestimable charity, which induced Him to contrive this wonderful expedient and supernatural means of becoming the spiritual food of our souls, and *abiding always with us unto the end of the world*—Matt. xxviii. May I not justly say, that this criminal and shameful neglect of the blessed sacrament proves to several Christians the first step to their spiritual ruin, and the unhappy occasion of being excluded from the eternal banquet of glory, prepared for the elect in the kingdom of Heaven? Like unto the guests that were invited to a great feast, as we read in the Gospel of St. Luke, xiv., they put off the invitation of their loving Redeemer from month to month, from year to year. They are not at leisure to wait on Him. They cannot spare time to correspond with the designs of His mercy. Temporal affairs, trifling amusements, and the fear of interrupting their pleasures and diversions, are counted sufficient obstacles and excuses to exculpate them in their own eyes. Such are the vain, frivolous apologies which they allege in their own defense; but the truth is that they are attentive to every thing but their salvation and

their improvement in virtue, and that in effect they set a greater esteem on the goods of earth than on the gifts of grace. They absent themselves, therefore, from the divine banquet, which the Lord, through an effect of His infinite goodness, has vouchsafed to provide for their sanctification. The health of the soul is gradually impaired by being thus deprived of its enlivening nourishment. Its strength is wasted. Its virtue is in a manner starved. Tenderness of conscience is removed. The fear of God is laid aside. Charity grows languid and inactive. The spirit of piety is extinguished. Concupiscence gets the upper hand, and thus the soul at length dies away, and becomes an easy prey to Satan, for want of its spiritual comfort and support. It is not uncommon to hear some people apologize for their neglect of communion, by saying they are not worthy to approach it, and have not the perfection that is requisite. But if they wait until they are worthy, when shall they communicate? Is not a deep sense of our own unworthiness one of the dispositions that are always necessary to a good communion? Is a person to make no approaches to the fire because he is cold? Is a man to have no recourse to the physician because he is sick? Two classes of Christians ought to communicate often, as St. Francis of Sales teaches us, in his *Introduction to a Devout Life*: The perfect and the imperfect, the strong and the feeble, the healthy and the sick. The former, because, being well disposed, they wrong and prejudice their souls by keeping from the source of all perfection, and by depriving themselves of the signal blessings and manifold graces which are derived from it. The latter ought also to communicate often in order to acquire perfection, to obtain spiritual strength, to improve in the love of God, and to learn to communicate well.

Come then, my brethren, and partake often of this delicious banquet of your Saviour's love. Come to this great supper, and heavenly feast of the Spotless Lamb. He calls on you, He invites you, He solicits you, in these affectionate words: *Come to me all you that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.* Come with an ardent desire of being united to Him. Come with a spiritual hunger and thirst, like the *wearied hart that panteth after the fountains of waters.* Come with great purity of conscience, clothed with the wedding garment of charity, and the white robe of Innocence, free from all the foul stains of mortal sin. Give your hearts entirely to Him who gives Himself entirely to you in this adorable sacrament. O amiable Jesus, may Thy holy name be eternally praised for this wonderful effect of Thy love and

mercy. Give us grace, we beseech Thee, to approach Thy sacred table with a devotion suitable to the greatness of Thy love. Grant us pardon for our past offenses, which we detest from the bottom of our hearts, because they displease Thee. Have compassion on our weakness, forgive us our past neglects, and preserve us from future relapses. Enliven our faith, strengthen our hope, inflame our charity, and unite us so closely to Thee, that nothing, either in life or death, may be able to divide or separate us from Thee ; but that after persevering unto the end in Thy love and service, we may have the happiness to enjoy Thee hereafter, in the clear vision of eternal bliss, which I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

PASSION· SUNDAY.

ON THE ADVANTAGES OF SUFFERINGS AND AFFLICTIONS.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. Introduction.
- II. Sufferings and consolations of this life.
- III. Their proper use.
- IV. Peroration.

Tulerunt ergo lapides ut jacerent in eum.—St. Jo. c. viii. v. 59.

They took up stones to cast at him —St. John, c. viii. v. 59.

WE enter this day into the time consecrated to the sufferings and passion of Jesus Christ, and therefore behold Him in the Gospel which the Church proposes to us, exposed to the contradiction, calumnies, and opposition of the Jews, His mortal enemies. They openly contradicted the divine truths which He taught them ; irreprehensible as He was, they dishonored Him by the grossest injuries, in attributing to Him the impiety of Samaritans, and the wickedness of the devil ; nay, they attempted His life, and if His love for us and the justice of His Eternal Father had not reserved Him for greater trials, He would then have consummated His sacrifice by sinking under a shower of stones that they took up to throw at Him ; but He absconded Himself from them, until the hour decreed for His passion and death was come Hence it

is, that the pictures and images of the crucifixes in our chapels are veiled, and the bloody standard of the Cross is erected on this day, which is called *Passion Sunday*, the remainder of the Lent being ordained for commemorating the dolorous mystery of Christ's passion, and for mourning for His death, or rather for our sins, which were the cause of it, and which like a veil interpose betwixt God and us. What subject more suitable to the time can I then propose to you than that of the Cross, to persuade you to suffer with Christian patience and resignation, the disgraces, the trials, crosses and afflictions that are incident to your respective states, in order to resemble and conform yourselves to Jesus, your model and Redeemer. But alas ! the generality of Christians, though disciples of a man of sorrows, and children of a crucified God, have an aversion and contempt for the cross ; it appears to them an object of folly as to the Pagans, or a subject of scandal as to the Jews. Some, in time of adversity, regard themselves as abandoned by Providence, and give themselves up to sadness and despair ; others murmur and repine at their condition, curse their fate, and wish themselves dead, and thus lose the merit of their sufferings by their impatience, not considering the manifold advantages and blessings they might otherwise draw from them, both with regard to this and the next life. For the instruction, and consolation, and encouragement both of the one and the other, I shall endeavor to give you a just notion of the sufferings and afflictions of this life, and encourage you at the same time to make proper use of them. I am far, however, from pretending that you are to divest yourself of the feelings of human nature, or, like the stoic philosophers, to affect a stupid insensibility to every thing that is painful to flesh and blood. What I wish to convince you of is, that the sufferings and afflictions of this transitory life are intended as a blessing, and in reality a most valuable blessing in themselves, as coming from the hands of God. In the first place, I will lay before you the advantages of them, and the motives that induce the Almighty to send you such trials. In the second place, I will point out the motive that should induce you to submit to the sufferings and afflictions with which the Almighty is pleased to visit you, and the spirit with which you ought to receive them. Let us previously implore the light of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, &c. *Ave Maria.*

Those who form their judgment of things according to human appearances, and more from the suggestions of self-love than from the rules

of the Gospel, look upon sufferings and afflictions in a most unfavorable light. Being accustomed to measure happiness by the maxims of the world, they conclude that all is well when success has crowned their desires, and when they peaceably enjoy all that they love and wish for ; on the contrary, they unjustly impeach Heaven, and arraign God's wisdom, when they are visited with trials and adversities, which they look upon as real evils to themselves, and as marks only of God's wrath and indignation ; they can scarce believe it to be the work of an all-wise Providence, that some should wallow in opulence and enjoy all kind of worldly comforts, and that others should languish under the severest pressures of indigence, and only feed on the bread of affliction. A Job sitting on a dunghill, and an Achab adored in his place ; a Saint Paul on the scaffold, and a Nero on the throne ; innocence oppressed and trodden under foot, whilst vice domineers and iniquity is triumphant, are to them mysteries which they cannot reconcile. But if they took religion for their guide, and viewed the afflictions and sufferings of this life with the eyes of faith, they would be convinced of the justice and advantages of them ; they would find that they are often the effects of God's infinite goodness, marks of His favor and clemency, pledges of His love, and seeds of everlasting happiness ; they would learn that the trials, adversities, and disappointments we meet with here on earth, are a merciful dispensation of the divine bounty, designed by the wisdom and providence of God as means of salvation, either to punish and correct the sinner, or to purify and perfect the just man. Many, indeed, and great are the miseries and calamities that sinners bring on themselves by their criminal conduct and profligate life ; nay, most of the afflictions and misfortunes that attend us in this vale of tears, are the fatal consequences of sin and the just punishment of our own personal iniquities. If some be afflicted like Jeroboam, either by the loss of substance or by the death of a darling child, it is, perhaps, because they gave him a profane education, or placed in him that love which is only due to the Creator ; it is, perhaps, because in their prosperity they were insensible to the wants and deaf to the cries of the poor ; it is, perhaps, because they converted the temporal blessings they enjoyed into seeds of everlasting misery, or squandered their superfluities in the pursuit of such worldly pleasures as served only to gratify their ambition. Others are struck with sickness and lingering disorders, perhaps, because when in health they were slaves to voluptuousness, and sacrificed all their desires to the violence of their passions. How many draw

down the vengeance of Heaven upon their own criminal heads by their horrible oaths, imprecations and blasphemies? How many bring themselves to public shame, scandal, and disgrace by the irregularity of their lives and the corruption of their morals? How many bring a long series of misfortunes upon themselves and others by their unjust conspiracies and wicked combinations? How many beggar their families, ruin their constitutions, and riot away their health by drunkenness, and the like criminal excesses? Is it any wonder, then, that all the diseases which follow debauchery should pour in upon them like a torrent? Is it any wonder that the seasons and elements, nay, the whole creation, should rise up against them, conspire their ruin, and sink them to the lowest ebb of misery and indigence? For where such enormous crimes as these prevail without control, the righteous judgments of the Lord will come upon the land, until it is made a subject of scorn and desolation, as the Scripture says. It is not, therefore, the treachery of men, the cruelty of enemies, the badness of the times, or the providence of God, that we are to accuse for the miseries and afflictions that surround us. Let us seek no other cause but the corruption of our hearts, and the irregularity of our lives. This is the source of our misfortunes, as the Lord declares by the mouth of the Prophet Ezechiel; so that we may truly say, what the children of Jacob formerly said of themselves in their affliction and distress, *It is with justice we suffer these calamities; we have deserved them, because we have sinned against the Lord.*

You will tell me, perhaps, that it is a long time since you have renounced your sinful disorders, and entered on the road of salvation, and notwithstanding that you are still afflicted and unhappy. But let me ask you, Have you expiated all your past sins by a sincere and perfect repentance? Have you fully satisfied the divine justice for all the follies and ignorances of your youthful days? Do you know that every sin must be punished here or hereafter, as St. Augustine says, either by the voluntary penance of man, or by the vengeance of an angry God? Are you not then indebted to His infinite goodness for furnishing you with a means to redeem the most exquisite pains and sufferings that are due to your sins in the next life, by the light and momentary sufferings of this life? Are you not indebted to Him for chastising you here in His mercy, and putting you under the happy necessity of discharging the penance, which otherwise you would neglect, and of canceling, at a small expense, the immense debt you owe His divine justice? If now, whilst the sun of grace and mercy shines, He is pleased to visit

you with poverty and sickness, with crosses and afflictions, it is for your correction, amendment, or improvement ; it is to give you a favorable opportunity of purifying your soul, of advancing in virtue, of increasing your merit, of practicing humility, patience, fortitude, and temperance. It is to recall you from your errors, to prevent relapses, to exercise your patience, and to fit you for the possession of life everlasting. If He scourges your body, it is to heal the wounds and disorders of your soul ; for, as Solomon says, *the rod and reproof give wisdom*. If He treats you with a seeming rigor, it is to draw you from the brink of perdition, and to rescue you from the eternal evils and intolerable torments of the next life. If He deprives you of the sweets and comforts of the flattering and deceitful world, it is to keep those things out of your way which He foresees would be the cause of your destruction and everlasting ruin.

You are sensible, my brethren, that riches are generally abused, and made the instrument and support of iniquity. There is nothing more common in the world than for a person to forget God, amidst the tempting allurements, the false joys, and dazzling charms of prosperity. As long as the world smiles on him, every thing that gratifies flesh and blood is easily purchased, and the force of religion is very often overthrown by the violence of passion, which made Christ pronounce a dreadful *woe to the rich*, and declare in the Gospel, *that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of Heaven*. The Lord, who desires not the death of a sinner, but that he be converted and live, takes from this prosperous man the fatal arms the world lent him for his destruction. Through an effect of His mercy He removes the obstacles of his salvation, He lowers his fortune, in order to make him reflect on his duty. He permits that he should be publicly disgraced and affronted, that he should be overturned by a law-suit, that fire should destroy his concerns, or some unexpected accident should interrupt his tranquillity, and put a stop to his avaricious projects, thereby to give him a hearty distaste for the world, to place him in the road of heaven, to oblige him to forsake the company of those who had so often led him astray, and to sanctify his soul by an humble retreat. This is what God assures us of by the Prophet Amos, saying, *I have consumed by a burning wind your lands and gardens, I have undermined all your stratagems and designs, in order to force you to return to the ways of salvation*. It was by the like means that the pride of Pharaoh was humbled, and the intolerable

arrogance of Nabuchodonosor was pulled down. It was in the horror of a tempest that Jonas confessed his disobedience. Manasses, who had insulted God on his throne, never thought of doing penance until he found himself in the prison of Babylon, humbled under the weight of his chains ; nor did the Israelites invoke the protection of Heaven until they felt the galling yoke and fury of the Philistines. It was adversity likewise that brought the brethren of Joseph to an humble confession of their guilt, and that opened the eyes of the prodigal son, and was the happy occasion of reclaiming him from his sinful course. But why need I produce so many examples out of the Scriptures to strengthen this argument, when several among yourselves can testify the same truth by experience ? I appeal to your own consciences, how many are there who would never have thought of returning to their duty to God, or of forsaking their darling vices, had not a lingering sickness, the sudden downfall and ruin of their family, or some other intervening accident unsealed their eyes, and discovered to them the folly, vanity, and emptiness of all earthly joys, and made them seek the solid happiness above, which this world is not able to afford.

Did you, my brethren, but seriously consider these important truths ; did you but reflect with attention on the designs of Heaven in sending you crosses, sufferings, and afflictions, you would discover such solid motives of comfort as would be sufficient to silence your murmurs ; to put a stop to your discontent, and induce you to embrace your trials, not only with patience, but even with pleasure and joy, let them be ever so painful and disagreeable to your weak nature. You would bless the merciful hand that wounds you in order to heal you, and thank that bounteous Father, who chastises you because He loves you ; you would bow down to His holy will, and say with the royal Prophet (Ps. xviii.) *It is good for me that Thou hast humbled me, O Lord.* Instead of arraigning Providence ; instead of flying in the face of God, and exclaiming against Heaven ; instead of being dejected, and giving way to melancholy and sadness ; instead of complaining that you are severely dealt with ; instead of breaking out into murmurs and blasphemies, which cannot assuage your pains, redress your grievances, or restrain God's vengeance, but rather redouble your misfortunes, and make your misery become more sensible, you would look upon your afflictions as blessings of Heaven, and embrace them as a grace, a benevolence, and overflowing of divine mercy. You would regard them as the just punishment of your sins, a sovereign remedy for your dis-

orders, and a powerful means of salvation. You would receive them with a due submission from God's holy hand, as tokens of His clemency. You would thank His goodness, for vouchsafing to accept of them as a penance for your manifold offenses, and as a retaliation for the terrible chastisements you would be obliged to undergo in the next world. You would endeavor to make a virtue of necessity, and bear with Christian patience the accidents and disgraces of the world, the reverses of fortune, the sickness and disorders with which you are visited, and offer them with great humility to the Lord, in sanctification for your transgressions, and in conjunction with the sufferings of Jesus Christ. If your reputation should happen to be tarnished by atrocious detractions and black calumnies, you would imitate King David, who patiently bore the maledictions of Semei, that they might prove to him a source of benedictions and graces. If you should happen to be distressed by unjust law-suits, or to be otherwise injured, abused, reviled, or persecuted, you would acknowledge with holy Job, that it is the hand of the Lord that strikes you, and that your enemies are only the instruments of His divine justice. However bitter the chalice of your sufferings may appear, you would say with your Blessed Redeemer, *Shall I not drink the chalice which my Heavenly Father has given me?* This, my brethren, is the use we should make of our sufferings and afflictions. This is our duty as Christians, and disciples of a Master who has recommended nothing more earnestly to us than the obligation of carrying our cross, and who has given us in His own person a most perfect model of patience. But, alas! how different from this is your conduct? Instead of respecting the rod in the hands of a charitable Father, do you not break it like a rebellious child, or rather do you not, like a senseless and furious animal, as St. Augustine speaks, bite and bark at the stone that strikes you, without considering who it is that throws it? Instead of submitting to the low condition in which Divine Providence has thought proper and expedient to place you, instead of acquiescing to the decrees of Heaven, and bearing the difficulties of your state in the spirit of humility and penance, do you not envy the prosperity of others? Are you not jealous of their imaginary happiness? Do you not frequently break out into murmurs and complaints? Do you not burst into bitter invectives upon the least insult that is offered to you? Do you not retaliate injuries, and discharge a dreadful volley of oaths and curses against your neighbor upon the least contradiction you meet with? Thus, by your impatience, you become martyrs without merit

or reward, and besides losing the benefits and fruits of your sufferings, you run the risk of being miserable in both worlds, and of becoming slaves to Satan, in flames for a never-ending eternity. Thus, in a word, you frustrate the designs of God's mercy, who has marked out no other road for conducting His servants to everlasting happiness but the royal way of the cross, and who tries the hearts of men in the furnace of adversity, as silver is tried by the fire, and gold in the furnace.

If we consult the Scriptures, almost every page will declare that crosses are the portion and inheritance of God's faithful servants, and that the just have been tried by sufferings and afflictions in all ages since the beginning of the world, adversity being the touchstone on which true virtue is tried and distinguished from what is only counterfeit. Abel was sacrificed by the fury of his brother. Jacob was in slavery with Laban. Joseph was sold by his brethren. The Hebrews were for a long time in the bondage of Pharaoh. Holy Job, from being the most opulent Prince in the East, was reduced to the lowest ebb of misery, stripped of all his possessions, covered all over with sores and ulcers, insulted and abandoned by his friends, and at length turned out of doors, and like an abortive thrown upon a dunghill. Tobias, that model of charity, and great servant of God, was deprived of the sight of both his eyes, and persecuted by his own wife and family. *Because he was acceptable to God*, as the Angel Raphael told him, *it was necessary that afflictions should try him*. St. John the Baptist was undoubtedly a child of Providence, a darling of Heaven, and a particular favorite of our Blessed Redeemer, and yet he was cast into prison and loaded with irons; his sacred head was cut off and brought upon a dish to Herod's table, whilst that monster of impiety wallowed in pleasures, feasted sumptuously in the midst of a brilliant court, and wantoned in all the luxurious affluence of wealth. In like manner, poor Lazarus was covered with ulcers, and pining away with hunger, whilst the rich epicure enjoyed all the comforts of life. But when Lazarus died, his soul was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom, whilst, on the contrary, the rich man was buried in hell. The one was comforted, the other tormented, *because one had received good things in his lifetime, and the other evil things*—Luke, xvi. So true it is, my brethren, that sufferings and afflictions are the usual marks whereby the Lord distinguishes His best friends and greatest favorites in this world. These are the most undoubted pledges of His love, and it is hereby He shows that He has not utterly cast us off as our sins have deserved. Other fathers spare

and indulge their children, but, as St. Paul assures us (Heb. xii.), *whom the Lord loveth He chastiseth, and He scourgeth every son whom He receiveth*. Jesus Christ Himself was not exempted. It was necessary *He should first suffer, and so enter into glory*. *He suffered*, says St. Peter (1 Ep. ii. 21,) *leaving us an example that we may follow His footsteps*. Like a tender-hearted physician, He vouchsafed to drink first Himself of the chalice of afflictions, and to sweeten it with a touch of His sacred lips, as St. Augustine speaks, that sick mortals, animated by His example, should not refuse the medicine which He prescribed as a powerful expedient for healing their spiritual disorders, and purifying their souls. Hence, when the mother of the two disciples, James and John, requested that they might be placed one at His right hand, the other at His left hand in His kingdom, He asked them if they were able to drink of His chalice, giving them thereby to understand that patience and resignation were the essential qualifications of His disciples, and that preferments in His kingdom were only attainable by trials and sufferings.

This was the road by which His blessed Apostles entered into the glory of Heaven; they drank large draughts of the bitter cup of affliction, and *rejoiced and were exceedingly glad* in their sufferings and tribulations, according to the instructions they had received from their Divine Master—Luke vi. 33. They carried their cross cheerfully after Him, and gloried in bearing some resemblance of His sufferings and mortifications, and in being made conformable to His image, as St. Paul speaks (Rom. viii. 29), for they knew that this was the character of the elect, and the only way to eternal happiness, which made the Apostle say, that *by many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God*—Acts xiv. 21. This holy spirit of suffering with pleasure and joy, was not confined to the Apostles, but extended itself to thousands of the faithful in the primitive ages of Christianity. They embraced all kinds of trials, sufferings, and torments, not only with patience and resignation to the will of God, but also with transports of joy, because they were convinced that what they suffered bore no proportion with the incomprehensible joys that are reserved in heaven for the faithful servants of God, after the afflictions and sufferings of this mortal life, according to these words of the Apostle: *The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed hereafter, for a moment of light tribulation worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory*—2 Cor. iv. 17.

The hope of receiving so ample a recompense sweetened all the sufferings and afflictions of the holy martyrs, and bathed their souls in a torrent of delights, whilst their bodies streamed with blood, and smarted under the stripes that were inflicted by their cruel tormenters. It was the same blessed hope also that encouraged holy Job to bear his afflictions with wonderful patience, and to return thanks to the Lord for the great trials he had to encounter, saying, *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away blessed be the name of the Lord*—Job. i. 21. It was it that made Tobias cry out to Heaven, and say, *I bless Thee, O Lord God of Israel, because Thou hast chastised me*. It was it that replenished the Machabees with spiritual joy and consolation in the midst of their most excruciating torments. It was it, in fine, that animated the three Hebrew children to walk through the flames of the fiery furnace of Babylon, singing a canticle of joy and thanksgiving, and inviting heaven and earth, the angels, the elements, and all creatures in the universe, to join them in blessing, praising, and magnifying the Lord for ever and ever. How happy would you be, my brethren, who lead a painful and laborious life, and who undergo so many hardships and distresses in the state wherein Providence has been pleased to place you, if you took care to follow those examples as far as human weakness will permit, and to sanctify the sufferings and afflictions you daily meet with by patience, resignation, and a perfect submission to the will of God? What treasures of merit would you not thereby amass for your souls? What an increase of glory would you not be entitled to? Every cross would become tolerably light and easy to you here, and heaven would be your everlasting inheritance hereafter. Learn, then, to be contented and satisfied in your state, and acknowledge with gratitude the mercy of God, who has rescued you from the many dangers to which prosperity and a life of ease and pleasure would expose you. Bow down with submission to the appointments of Divine Providence, receive sickness, adversity, and every other trial you are visited with, as coming from the holy hand of God, and designed for your good. O merciful Jesus, Thou perfect model of all suffering and afflicted Christians, enable us to bear up against the feelings and reluctance of our corrupt nature, and to carry our cross cheerfully after Thee. Have compassion on our frailty, and support our weakness, that we may not sink under the weight of those sufferings which Thou art pleased to send us, or frustrate the designs of Thy mercy by our impatience and want of resignation. Pardon our past feelings, and grant that in future we may look upon the trials and

afflictions of this life as a merciful dispensation of Thy divine bounty, and that we may willingly accept of them in the spirit of humility and penance. Give us grace to say from the bottom of our hearts, *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven*; for it is by doing Thy will, and not our own, that we may confidently hope to attain the happy end of our creation, and to be admitted hereafter, through Thy infinite merits, into the kingdom of eternal glory, which Thou hast purchased for us by the effusion of Thy precious blood, and which I, my brethren, wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

PALM SUNDAY.

ON THE DISPOSITIONS REQUIRED TO A WORTHY PASCHAL COMMUNION.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. The entry of Christ into Jerusalem.
- II. Sins against the Blessed Sacrament.
- III. Annual communion.
- IV. Unworthy communion.
- V. Peroration.

Ecce Rex tuus Venit tibi mansuetus.—*St. Matt. c. xxi. v. 5.*

Behold thy King cometh to thee with meekness.—*St. Matt. c. xxi. v. 5.*

THE Gospel of this day relates the triumphant entry of our Blessed Saviour into the city of Jerusalem, amidst the loud acclamations of a vast confluence of people that accompanied him, carrying branches of palms and boughs of olive in their hands, and singing, with raptures of joy, pious *hosannas to the son of David*. It is in honor and in imitation hereof that a solemn procession is held on this day in Catholic countries, the faithful assisting thereat, and carrying branches of blessed palm in their hands, as emblems of that glorious victory which our heavenly King gained over sin and death, and by which He threw open the gates of Heaven to the banished children of Eve. In all probability the multitude that accompanied Him at the time of His entry into Jerusalem was composed chiefly of poor country people, from the neighboring villages and cottages; for we scarce find that any person of note or

distinction applied to Him for instruction, except Nicodemus, who came to Him in private, and the rich young man, who soon forsook Him when he was ordered to sell all his worldly possessions, and distribute the produce of them to the poor. The poor seem to have been the usual attendants, and the favorite companions of our Divine Redeemer. A few poor shepherds were the first that welcomed Him into the world, and adored Him. A poor carpenter was his guardian, and entertained Him in his house. Poor fishermen attended Him in His mission, and a crowd of poor women followed Him to Mount Calvary, to the foot of the cross. Hence it appears, that the poor are more attached to the service of God, and bid fairer for the kingdom of Heaven than the rich; and therefore, that their state is not so thoroughly miserable as the world imagines, nor is the state of the rich so truly happy, or so much to be envied. The poor meet with so many favorable opportunities to sanctify their souls, and to merit a happy eternity, by submitting with patience and resignation to the trials and sufferings of this transitory life, that the Gospel expressly says, *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven*. On the contrary, the rich are surrounded with so many snares, and exposed to so many dangerous temptations, that the Gospel pronounces a dreadful *woe to the rich*, and declares it is harder for them to enter the kingdom of Heaven, than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. It may appear somewhat surprising, that our Blessed Saviour would admit of so much outward pomp and solemnity, upon making His entry into Jerusalem, especially if we consider that He always declined temporal honors, and showed so great a contempt for worldly grandeur, that He declared His *kingdom was not of this world*, and that He fled to a mountain to hide himself when the multitude, which He had fed in the desert with five barley loaves and two small fishes, intended to proclaim Him their king. But His reason for admitting the innocent triumph of Palm Sunday was, that He might fulfill the prophecies; and let us see at the same time with what pleasure and alacrity He was going to Jerusalem, to lay down His life for the redemption of mankind. Jerusalem was to be the bloody theatre of His passion in a few days after. He therefore entered it in triumph, to denote the pressing desire He was actuated with, to undertake and accomplish that great work of His boundless charity. The honor and respect which His faithful disciples and friends paid Him at His entry into Jerusalem, point out to us the dispositions with which we ought to receive Him in the blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist, at

the approaching solemnity of Easter, and afford me a favorable opportunity to lay before you the necessary conditions of a worthy Paschal Communion, and the crying malice and enormity of an unworthy or sacrilegious communion. Let us first humbly implore the light of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin. *Ave Maria.*

Two great disorders reign at present in Christianity with regard to the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist. It is shamefully neglected by some, and presumptuously received by others, by which means it unhappily happens that this most precious treasure, and most excellent gift of Heaven, becomes useless to the one, and proves fatal to the other. The former, by slighting it, deprive their own souls of the manifold graces and blessings which they would derive from a worthy communion. The latter defile their souls where they should purify them, and incur death in eating the food of life, because they do not discern it from common food, but rashly approach the table of the Lord without having previously tried themselves, according to the direction of the Apostle. Thus both the one and the other reap no benefit from this august mystery, but defeat the views and merciful designs of the Saviour of the world, and obstruct, by their evil dispositions, the virtue and wonderful effects that the spiritual food of the soul would otherwise operate in it, much after the same manner that the virtue of corporal food is often obstructed by the indisposition of those who partake of it.

In order to remedy these evils, the Catholic Church, assembled in the general Council of Lateran, has commanded the faithful, under pain of incurring the guilt of mortal sin, and of being liable to an excommunication, to receive the blessed sacrament of the Eucharist with the necessary dispositions, at least once a year. This precept of annual communion is grounded upon a divine precept of Christ himself, and the particular time that the Church has determined and fixed for complying with it, is the holy time of Easter, or thereabouts, as being the fittest and most proper time in the whole year; because it was then, on the very eve of His passion and death, that our Divine Redeemer first established this precious monument of His boundless charity, and bequeathed to His Church this inestimable legacy of His own sacred body and blood, in the form of a banquet, under the two different species or outward appearances of bread and wine; for bread and wine, being most nourishing to the body, were the most proper to represent the grace of this sacrament, and to denote that it was instituted in order to serve

as a continual banquet for the spiritual comfort and nourishment of the souls of the faithful, unto the very end of the world. To participate worthily of this heavenly banquet should be the grand object and wish of every Christian. There is no religious duty of greater consequence, or more conducive to our happiness, both here and hereafter, as on the contrary there can be no greater misfortune than to partake of it unworthily, or in a state of mortal sin. It is evident that neither the divine nor the ecclesiastical precept can be fulfilled by an unworthy or sacrilegious communion. To prevent so dreadful an evil, we are to search our conscience diligently, and make the best preparation we can before we venture to approach the sacred table of Jesus Christ. All the fruit and benefit we can hope to receive, depend on the preparation we make, and on the dispositions with which we communicate. The more diligently and devoutly we prepare and dispose our souls, the more graces and the greater blessings we have a right to expect. The conduct of the pious multitude, mentioned in this day's Gospel, is a model and pattern worthy of our attention and imitation. The innocent triumph which they prepared for the entry of our Lord Jesus Christ into Jerusalem is to be considered as a figure and representation of His entrance into the soul of a Christian by a worthy Easter communion. The honor and respect they paid Him, and the welcome reception which they gave Him on this occasion, show us also in what manner, and with what dispositions we ought to receive Him at this holy time in the blessed sacrament. In the first place, they were His faithful disciples and real friends who received Him triumphantly into the aforesaid city, and treated Him with due respect; hereby we are taught that it is necessary to be of the number of His true friends and disciples, in order to be qualified to receive Him worthily in the holy communion. Whoever, therefore, has had the misfortune to lose the grace of God, and to become His enemy by mortal sin, must previously recover His love and friendship by a sincere repentance, before he ventures to approach the blessed sacrament. Like unto the Hebrew children mentioned in the Gospel, he must go out of Jerusalem; he must quit the dangerous places, wicked company, and other occasions whereby he forfeited his innocence. He must meet the King of Meekness with a clean heart, with an ardent desire, and a pure intention of being united to Him. He must, like the pious multitude, present Him with branches of palm and boughs of olive, that is to say, he must gain a victory over his favorite vices and darling passions. He must use his best endeavors to conquer inordinate pride

and self-love, and to be reinstated in that happy peace which the Holy Ghost produces in the soul that he inhabits. The boughs of olive and branches of palm are emblems and symbols of this peace, and trophies of the victory that is to be obtained before he is admitted to partake of the heavenly banquet of Jesus Christ.

The pious multitude also stripped off their garments, and spread them on the way that our Lord was to pass over. They covered it with green boughs, and ornamented it as decently as they could, singing at the same time canticles of joy, praise, and thanksgiving in honor of the King of Israel, who came with sweetness and meekness to visit them. Their conduct instructs us, that in order to render ourselves worthy to receive a visit from Christ our Lord, and to be qualified for partaking of the signal blessings and graces with which he comes to enrich our souls in the holy communion, we must be prepared to receive Him with profound respect, veneration, and humility. We must throw off the old man, and clothe ourselves in the new. We must cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. We must divest ourselves of our evil habits, and trample upon the tempting allurements and sinful vanities of the world. We must embellish and adorn our souls with the christian virtues of faith, hope, and charity, and from the bottom of our hearts breathe forth fervent and devout acts of adoration, praise, and thanksgiving. We must, as St. Augustine says, bring innocence with us to the altar of God, and be clothed with the nuptial robe and wedding garment of charity and sanctifying grace, that we may not deserve to be treated like the unhappy guest mentioned in St. Matthew, xxii., who was tied hands and feet and cast into exterior darkness, because he thrust himself into the wedding supper without the wedding garment. Our Blessed Saviour Himself, by washing the feet of His disciples at His last supper, before He administered to them the adorable sacrament of His body and blood, has given us sufficiently to understand what great purity, both of soul and body, He requires in those who are to sit at His table, and to partake of His divine banquet. Let no one, therefore, who is in the habit or affection of mortal sin attempt to present himself. Let no Judas, no scandalous sinner approach. Pearls are not to be cast before swine, nor is the bread of children and the food of angels to be shared with dogs, as the Scripture phrase expresses it, Matt. xv., that is to say, with those who are wallowing in the mire of iniquity, and constantly relapsing and returning like dogs to their vomit. *He that eateth and drinketh unworthily*, says St. Paul, *eateth and drinketh*

judgment to himself. He is guilty of a sacrilege of the blackest dye, that deserves the thunderbolts of divine vengeance. St. Augustine compares the unworthy communicant to Judas the traitor, who with a kiss delivered Jesus Christ to His enemies. St. John Chrysostom says, that he resembles the executioners on Mount Calvary, who nailed Him to the cross, and really put Him to death. Wo be to that man by whom the Son of God is thus betrayed and recrucified ! If sacrilege of any kind whatever, even the lowest degree, be so offensive and so hateful in the sight of God, that He has been often provoked to punish it most severely even in this life, as appears from the many visible judgments, which, according to the Scriptures, have been inflicted on the profaners of the Ark of the Covenant, the victims, sacrifices, and sacred vessels of the Temple of Jerusalem, what an odious and enormous crime must it be, and how outrageously provoking and injurious to God, to profane the most adorable sacrament of the Eucharist, and abuse what is most holy in religion by a sacrilegious communion ? Nothing hardens the heart of a sinner more, or paves the way sooner to apostacy and irreligion, as is evident in unhappy Judas, who should be the terror, as he was the first example of an unworthy communicant. They who, under the mask of piety, and the outward appearance of devotion, presume to communicate unworthily, copy after this apostate, and betray their Lord and Master with the signal of a kiss. Good Christians, says St. John Chrysostom, are conducted to the blessed sacrament by the light of Heaven, as the three wise men of the East were conducted to the stable of Bethlehem by a star. But they who receive unworthily are led on by the evil spirit, as the wicked and treacherous King Herod was, when, under the specious pretense of paying homage to our newly born Redeemer, he only sought an opportunity to take away His life.

Beware, my dear brethren, of ever defiling your souls with a sacrilege of so horrid a nature and so black a dye. Beware of receiving the God of sanctity, the God of charity, the God of purity, into a soul polluted with iniquity ; a breast heaving with hatred and malice against your neighbor, or a heart full of pride, black with envy, or burning with criminal desires or impure love. Beware, I say, of such impiety, but at the same time beware also of falling into the opposite extreme, and absenting yourselves from the spring of life, and the fountain of grace. Remember that the sacrament of Christ's body and blood is necessary for the perservation of the spiritual life of your souls,

as corporal food is necessary for the preservation of the life of your bodies. Christ himself declares (St. John, vi.), *unless you eat His flesh and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you.* A soul that is dead by mortal sin, can receive no benefit from this spiritual food, as a dead body can receive no nourishment from corporal food ; moreover, as the very same corporal food, which nourishes a healthy man, may overwhelm and hasten the death of a sick man, so, in like manner, this heavenly and divine food, which gives life to the good, brings death to the wicked, who are pushed on by a criminal temerity to receive it whilst they are unhappily involved in the state and affection of grievous sins.

O let me then exhort you, my brethren, to hasten to the throne of mercy without further delay, and, like the prodigal son, to return to the loving embraces of your Heavenly Father. Enter into the spirit of the Church, and of this penitential season, and prepare a fit habitation in your souls for the reception of Jesus Christ ; cleanse and purify your hearts, and wash away all the foul stains of your sins in the salutary waters of penance, that you may share in the blessings of this holy time, and experience the manifold advantages and happy fruits of a worthy communion.

O amiable Redeemer, since in Thy great mercy Thou hast vouchsafed to provide this delicious banquet for our spiritual nourishment, give us grace to have frequent recourse to it with the necessary dispositions. Imprint in our souls a just abhorrence of an unworthy and sacrilegious communion, and make us truly sensible of the salutary effects of a devout and worthy communion. Enliven our faith, and excite in us an ardent desire to receive this great sacrament of Thy love frequently, during the course of our mortal pilgrimage, but particularly at the hour of our death, that it may fortify us against the assaults of the enemy, and serve us as a viatic to a blessed eternity ; which I wish you all, in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

EASTER SUNDAY.

ON THE FEAST OF THE RESURRECTION OF OUR
LORD JESUS CHRIST

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. The gloom of the Crucifixion and the glories of the Resurrection.
- II. The qualities of a true conversion.
- III. The conditions of a true conversion.
- IV. Peroration on the lesson to be gained from the example of Mary Magdalen.

Et cum transisset Sabbatum, Maria Magdalena et Maria Jacobi et Salome emerunt aromata, ut venientes ungerent Jesum.—*St. Mark, c. xvi. v. 1.*

When the Sabbath was passed, Mary Magdalen and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought sweet spices, that coming they might anoint Jesus.—*St. Mark, c. xvi. v. 1.*

As all nature was seized with confusion, and touched with compassion on the sorrowful day of our Saviour's bitter passion and death, so, in like manner, all nature was replenished with joy and consolation on the happy day of His glorious resurrection. The sun, which on Good Friday had withdrawn its glittering beams, lest it should behold the Creator of its beauty expiring on an ignominious cross, hastened early in the morning to usher in the day of His resurrection with an extraordinary splendor; heaven opened its lofty gates, and sent forth an angelical Ambassador, whose robes were as white as the driven snow, to proclaim the signal victory and triumph of the Son of God; the universe was struck with admiration; the sepulchres flew open, and *many dead bodies of the saints who had departed this life arose out of their graves and appeared to several of the inhabitants of Jerusalem*, as St. Matthew informs us—ch. xxvii. The souls of the holy patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament were in raptures of joy to find themselves freed from their tedious captivity. No tongue can describe the comfort that this glorious event gave Mary, the Blessed Mother of Jesus, who, two days before that, had been a most afflicted eye-witness of the bloody tragedy that was acted on Mount Calvary; for if, as the Scripture relates, the patriarch Jacob exulted with joy when he understood that his favorite son Joseph, whom he supposed to be dead, was alive in the kingdom of Egypt, what transports and ecstasies must the affectionate heart of Mary have felt, when she supposed that her dearly beloved Son

Jesus was risen out of the bowels of the earth, clothed with an immortal, impassible, and glorified body? The disciples also, who shortly before had been sorely afflicted and plunged into excessive sorrow for the loss of their dear Lord and Master, were most sensibly affected, and filled with consolation at the joyful tidings that were announced to them by the devout women who had visited the sepulchre. In a word, the resurrection of Jesus Christ diffused a universal joy through all nature, and caused the heavens and the earth to resound with sweet alleluias and sacred canticles of adoration, praise, and thanksgiving. His enemies alone were confounded and covered with shame. Satan, who in the Scripture language is denominated the Prince of this darkness, lamented to behold himself cast out, and to find his empire overthrown, hell disarmed, sin destroyed, and the world subdued, *not with the sword, but with the wood of the cross*, as St. Augustine speaks. What a noble, what a happy victory, my brethren, which thus threw open the gates of heaven to mankind! What a grand subject of joy and exultation for all the faithful! My design, however, at present, on this great feast of the triumph of our Lord and Master is, not to engage your attention with a mere speculative display and contemplation of this sublime mystery, but to propose Mary Magdalen, at the tomb of Jesus Christ, as a model of the most exemplary piety, and to entertain you, not so much with the glory of His resurrection, as with the spirit and religious practices with which you are to honor this sacred mystery. Many of you have already approached the venerable sacrament of the Altar, and I trust in the mercy of God that, like Magdalen, you have had the happiness to find Jesus Christ. If all have not been so fortunate, it is because they did not seek for Him with the same ardor and spirit that she did. Learn, then, by the example I shall lay before you, the qualities and conditions of a real and sincere conversion, that if you have been deficient herein, you may, without further delay, rectify your mistakes, correct your defects, and repair the faults of an illusive and pretended conversion. Let us first implore the divine assistance, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, addressing her this day with the anthem of the Church, *Regina Cæli letare, Alleluia, &c.*

To point out the qualities and conditions of a true conversion, and to animate you thereto, I cannot lay before you a more consoling instance of the mercy of God, or a more edifying model of piety, than that of the renowned convert, Mary Magdalen. Having expiated her sins by the fervor of her charity, and by a torrent of tears at the feet of her

Divine Redeemer, she attended Him in His sacred passion, even when He was forsaken by His disciples. She stood under the cross on Mount Calvary, with weeping eyes, at the time of His crucifixion, was present at His interment, and had the comfort to be the first that saw Him after His glorious resurrection. Three characters discover to us her vehement desire to find Him. First, her promptitude and haste, whereby she anticipated the rising of the sun. Secondly, the anxiety and disquiet wherewith she was actuated. Thirdly, her courage and intrepidity, whereby she resolved to surmount every obstacle that might hinder her approach to her best beloved Master. By these dispositions, which obtained for her the happiness of seeing Jesus Christ, after His resurrection, before all others, you may form a proper judgment of the conversions of this holy time. As to the first, a plain and simple exposition of this day's gospel is the most sensible proof of that holy impatience with which she sought for Jesus Christ. *When the Sabbath was passed*, says the sacred text, *Mary Magdalen bought sweet spices to embalm the body of Jesus*. In what anxieties and impetuous desires did she pass the Sabbath day, which, by an indispensable duty, was consecrated to repose? All the authority of the law was requisite to moderate her ardor, and to stay her zeal; nor could she desist, according to St. Luke, xxiii., during the repose of her retreat, from preparing the perfumes, with which she intended to embalm the body of Jesus, according to the custom of the Jews. Scarce is the Sabbath expired, when she takes the road of the sepulchre; she does not expect the rising of the sun, or the first dawn of the morning; her zeal guides her through the darkness of the night, and without listening to the bashful delicacy, or to the fear so natural to her sex, she arrives at the tomb of Jesus Christ before even any of His Apostles. Is it possible to remark a greater promptitude, or a more lively vivacity, to acquit herself of this holy and religious duty?

This, my brethren, is what divine grace requires from you; it demands hearts ready to follow the inspirations and divine attractives with which the Holy Ghost prevents, visits, excites, and draws you. Far from this happy disposition are those fluctuating, those uncertain, those irresolute Christians, who continually waver, and balance whether they shall forsake their evil ways and convert themselves to the Lord their God, or not; for as he is an infidel who freely and deliberately doubts of an article of faith, so he that hesitates and deliberates only on penance, is as yet impenitent, and the enemy of God. I own, indeed, that

time, and even years are sometimes required to arrive at the **summit** and perfection of Christian virtue ; but the conversion of the **heart is** the work of the happy moment, wherein the Holy Ghost suddenly **enlightens** the soul, and pierces it with a dart that wounds and softens it in the twinkling of an eye. If you, therefore, **neglect this favorable** time of your visitation ; if you slight this precious moment, and **reject** this gracious call and invitation to repentance, instead of becoming **penitents**, you will remain hardened sinners, particularly you who live in the midst of the corruption and vanity of the world ; for by neglecting to correspond with the favors of Heaven, you render yourselves **unworthy** of them, and you run the risk of being punished with a subtraction of those graces which you ungratefully slight and reject. In effect, **at** what other time will God's grace find access to your hearts ? **Is it** whilst they are full of unlawful pleasures, possessed with ambition, governed by passion and interest, and intoxicated with the love of the corrupted world ? No, my brethren. If, whilst the divine light of the Holy Ghost dawns upon your hearts, you balance, you hesitate, instead of acquiescing to its sweet, its lovely dictates ; if, content with some faint, some imperfect desires of conversion, which only lull you in the sleep of sin, you flatter yourselves that you seek the Lord **your** God sincerely, be undeceived this day ; it is only illusion, and a deplorable blindness ; for the first mark of a sincere conversion is a **promptitude** or readiness to follow the dictates of divine grace.

The second mark is a holy anxiety, or an impetuous desire, **which** animates the soul to return to her Lord and to her God without **delay**. The Gospel points out to us, in the most lively colors, the anxiety, **and** the longing desire of Magdalen to find the body of her Saviour. **Scarce** is the Sabbath finished when her first thought is, Who will roll away for her the huge stone that shut the sepulchre ? For she had exactly observed every thing about it, with a design of coming to pay Jesus her last duties ; not out of any human respect, vainly to acknowledge the person who of all the world she was most obliged to ; but out of most holy impatience to review the only object that her soul loved ; for **as** soon as she perceived the monument open, and the body gone, her tears testified the sorrows of her soul. She does not sit down, or place herself in any quiet posture, but she is pushed backward and forward by the agitation of her soul. She does not search for the silent alleys or lonely retreats of the adjacent Garden of Olives, to indulge and think upon her grief ; her love fixes her immovable to that now empty sepul-

chre where all her joys were laid the third day before. Her eyes perpetually search to see if she can perceive the least remains of the lovely object which she regrets. The Apostles, who were now likewise come to search for their Lord and Master, not finding His body, returned back from whence they came. It was enough for them, says St. Augustine, to see He was not there; but it was not enough for the soul of Mary, languishing with divine love: she stays there alone, and becomes obstinate in searching for her Jesus; she will absolutely find Him where He is not; she has already looked several times into the monument, but she still makes herself believe that her eyes have deceived her. She stoops again and again, and devours the obscure mansion with her eyes. Nothing can escape her diligence. At length two angels appear to her, clothed with light. Every other person would be charmed, would be dazzled at the glorious sight, and forget all other cares; but nothing can compensate Mary for the loss of her Jesus, whom she cannot find. The angels say to her, *Woman, why dost thou weep?* But she answers: O! when you shall be acquainted with the cause of my tears, you will acknowledge that I am the most miserable of women. I weep, *because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have put Him.* I lament, because they have taken away my Master, and with Him my joy, my life, my repose, my treasure, and I do not know where to seek for Him.

It is just after this manner that a sincere penitent speaks, when truly touched with a desire of finding God whom he lost by sin. He that before accounted as nothing the losing of the grace of God, begins now to be sensible of the miserable state of his conscience. He is now astonished how it is possible for a Christian to live without the favor and friendship of the Lord. He now perceives that the commerce of the world, a life of dissipation and pleasures, an enchainment of temporal occupations, a constant circle of vain amusements, an unhappy criminal passion, an unwearied ardor to gain the tinselled prosperity and perishable riches of this life, a set of evil companions and associates, have made him forget his God, and thrown him into a mortal lethargy with regard to heaven and his salvation. He then bursts out into the most lively and pungent regrets; he cries out with Magdalen, *They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have placed Him.* Alas! I have hitherto lived as if there was no God for me. Is it not possible for me to return, once more, to that happy state wherein God was my Father, my friend, and my delight. He exclaims with the

Prophet Isaias, c. xxii., *Recedite a me, amare flebo* ; *Retire from me, O you vain amusements, you frivolous pleasures, you idle affairs ; disappear and give way to the great, to the only important affair of my salvation. O worldly vanities, you have but too long consumed my time and captivated my heart. Leave me now, that I may at leisure regret a loss which my tears only are able to repair. Such is the language, such are the sentiments of a true convert. He does not seek for an easy, for an indulgent director to smooth over his crimes and doze his conscience. The most circumspect, the most vigilant, and the most charitable, scarce appears to him capable of rolling away the huge stone, and removing the mountain of sin, whose insupportable weight lies so heavy upon his conscience. He cries out, like Magdalen, *Quis revolvat, &c. Who will roll away the huge stone that shuts the sepulchre ?* O where shall I find the man of God who will soften the hardness of my heart ? He is not satisfied, as heretofore, with a slight, superficial examination of his conscience ; he looks narrowly into the most secret folds and hidden recesses of his heart ; he probes the wounds of his soul to the very bottom. Like Mary Magdalen, he stoops and carefully views the dark abode, that nothing may escape unnoticed, or go unpunished. Hence it is, that we have sometimes the consolation to find those persons, whose consciences were heretofore seared and hardened, acquire, in process of time, delicacies of conscience which we do not usually find even in the just. They enter into a holy disquiet for the present state of their souls ; they are never satisfied with themselves ; they imagine that they can never explain themselves as fully as they ought ; that they can never sufficiently regret the disorders of their past life, nor take sufficient precautions to guard against sin for the future. This is generally the case of those who are sincerely converted to God, especially after being entangled in great disorders, and involved in criminal habits. The beginning of their conversions are usually accompanied by the like agitations and troubles ; for, as St. Augustine remarks, a sinner does not disengage himself but with difficulty from what he loved with ardency, and this is the very foundation of many heroic acts of contrition, by which the character of a true Gospel penitent is so easily discovered. But let us return to our model. Whilst Mary Magdalen remained, all bathed in tears, at the tomb of Jesus Christ, the Son of God presented Himself to her under the form of a gardener. Her grief inspires her with a respect uncommon for persons in this line of life, perhaps to engage Him to discover to her the body of her Lord, which she seeks*

for. She says to him, *Sir, if thou hast taken Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him?* John, xx. But Magdalen, who do you speak of? *Him?* What is the name of the person you seek for? Alas! your love makes you imagine that every heart is as full of your Divine Master as your own, and that every one should know whom you inquire for. But, O great misfortune! there are few, and very few, comparatively speaking, who think seriously of the Lord their God, or have His love thus fixed in their hearts. But Magdalen, what will it avail you to know where He is? What is your design? *O! I will take Him from thence*, said she; I will put Him in a place of safety, and hereafter not hazard the losing of my Jesus any more. I will again wash with my tears those sacred feet, where I first found the remission of my sins. I will contemplate, at leisure, that divine mouth from whence so many heavenly oracles have proceeded, and which gave me life in pronouncing the sentence of my absolution. But, Mary, do you reflect upon what you say? You are alone, a weak woman, without help and assistance, and yet you pretend to take away from the bosom of the tomb, and from the centre of death, the body which a strong guard of soldiers is watching. Yes, yes, *I will take Him away*, said she; conduct me to where it is; leave the rest to myself. I do not fear either the guards, or the darkness of the night, or the weakness of my sex. I do not care for my life, after having lost my Saviour; and I think nothing difficult, nothing impossible, so I can find Him once more.

Behold, my brethren, the natural image of a true penitent, moved and touched by the grace of the Almighty God. Nothing can obstruct the vivacity of his pious designs. The devil, the world, and the flesh appear weak and impotent enemies to him. He that heretofore dreaded everything, now becomes intrepid and undaunted. He renounces with pleasure the dangerous company of those persons, without whom life seemed before bitter and tasteless. He perceives the faint sparkles of profane love expiring in his breast, and feels the ardors of a pure and holy love inflaming his heart. He begins to love the only object that deserves to be loved, and tramples under foot the unhappy object which before he blindly preferred to it. He submits cheerfully to the sweet yoke of the Gospel, which before seemed so difficult; and he is willing to observe the fasts of the Church, which heretofore appeared insupportable to the pretended delicacy of his constitution. He is ready to practice all the duties of a Christian; to make restitution of the wealth he unjustly acquired, to repair the scandal he has given, to

recall the detractions and calumnies he has spread, and to lay aside the enmity and resentment he harbored in his breast. Nothing appears superior to the love he feels for his God ; but every thing seems light, easy, and sweet, provided he does not regain his friendship. The world is now nothing to him ; he is convinced of its delusive vanity ; he despises its applauses, its censures and railleries, and resolves not to sacrifice his salvation any longer to a phantom of human respect. In fine, whatever it costs him, he is determined to seek the Lord his God without delay, and to serve Him only. It is thus that Magdalen instructs you, my brethren, this day, to seek and to search for the Lord your God, when you have unhappily lost Him by sin ; and if you search for Him with the same spirit and ardor that she did, you will surely find the arms of His tender mercy open to embrace you. When she could no longer enjoy the visible presence of her Divine Redeemer, who possessed her whole heart, she sequestered herself from the dangerous society of the world, lest any thing should divert her thoughts from the only object that could give her any comfort or satisfaction. And though she had the happiness to hear the sentence of her absolution pronounced by Jesus Christ Himself in person, yet this did not hinder her from bewailing her past irregularities, in the bitterness of her soul, as long as she lived, because her love told her that she could never sufficiently bewail and lament her former disorders, nor guard too carefully against sin for the future. For this reason she devoted the remainder of her life to sighs, tears, to prayer, and to every exercise of divine love and charity, whereby she became a great favorite of Heaven, and a perfect model of penance to all succeeding ages.

Learn then, Christian penitents, by her example, what steps you are to take, in order to recover the grace of God, and what precautions are necessary to preserve this grace when you have once happily recovered it. Like unto Magdalen, retain always a grateful sense of God's goodness to you, and beware of ever relapsing into any of your past disorders. Shun all the dangerous occasions of sin, and embrace voluntary practices of penance, in order to satisfy the justice of an offended Deity. Bewail your ingritudes as long as you live, and continue both day and night to beseech the God of Mercy, with the Royal Prophet, (Psalm 1), *To wash you still more from your iniquity, and to cleanse you from your former sins.* Inspire us, O loving Jesus, with the like penitential sentiments. Let us no longer be deceived with the shadow of repentance ; but grant us all the gift of a sincere conversion, and the

acceptable dispositions of a contrite and humble heart, that, like the happy Magdalen, we may be entitled to hear these words of comfort pronounced in our favor, *Thy sins are forgiven thee ; thy faith hath made thee safe ; go in peace*.—St. Luke, vii. This is the blessing which I heartily wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

LOW SUNDAY.

ON THE INSTITUTION AND NATURE OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. Penance, a *second plank after Baptism*.
- II. Penance is a Sacrament of Divine institution.
- III. The nature of Penance.
- IV. The dispositions necessary to receive it.
- V. Conclusion, with an appeal to the Father of Mercies.

Accipite Spiritum Sanctum quorum remisistis peccata remittuntur eis, et quorum retinueritis, retenta sunt —St. Jo. c. xx. v. 22, 23.

Receive ye the Holy Ghost : Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them, and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained. —St. John, c. xx. v. 22, 23.

As the paternal providence of God has provided remedies for healing the distempers of our bodies, so, in like manner, His boundless mercy has provided remedies for healing the spiritual disorders of our sinful souls. For the remission of original sin, which we inherit from our first parents, our Lord Jesus Christ instituted the sacrament of Baptism, whereby we are delivered from the bondage of Satan, and made the adoptive children of God and heirs of life everlasting. For the remission of the actual and personal sins, which we ourselves commit after baptism, He instituted the sacrament of Penance, whereby repenting sinners, who have unhappily forfeited their innocence after having been cleansed and sanctified in the laver of baptism, may be reconciled again and reinstated in the grace of God, provided they sue for it with proper dispositions. Penance is therefore called the *second plank after shipwreck*, inasmuch as those who have had the misfortune to make a shipwreck of their baptismal sanctity, and to split upon the rock of mortal

sin, may still escape, by seizing on the plank of penance, and may be safely conducted, by the help of it through the stormy sea of this world, into the desired harbor of eternal bliss. Thus the Lord our God, who is rich in mercy, and who knows the frailty of our nature and our proneness to evil from our very infancy, has vouchsafed to provide suitable remedies for all our spiritual necessities, and has left nothing undone that was necessary for our eternal salvation. Had our Divine Redeemer not left a sacrament in His Church for the remission of the sins that are committed after baptism, as well as He did for the remission of sins committed before it, what would become of the generality of Christians? For how few are there of the adult who inviolably preserve their baptismal innocence, without falling into some sin? If there was no other remedy, no other sacrament for the remission of sin but Baptism, how could the sins which they fall into after baptism be forgiven? And if they lived and died under the guilt of such sins, how could they expect to be saved and admitted into the holy city of the heavenly Jerusalem? since, as the Scripture assures us, *there shall not enter into it anything defiled*—Apocalypse, xxi. 27

Thanks be to Heaven, my brethren, we have been brought up in a religious persuasion that does not exclude us from the benefit of a sacrament, which is necessary, at least in desire, when it cannot be actually received, for the remission of actual mortal sins, as baptism is for the remission of original sin. The very Apostles' Creed teaches us, that Christ our Lord has left a power in the Holy Catholic Church to forgive sins in His name, and by His authority; and the Gospel informs us that He Himself exercised this power on several occasions; nay, we read in chap. ix. of St. Matthew, that He wrought an illustrious miracle in favor of a man who was ill of a palsy, in order to convince the incredulous Jews that He *had a power to forgive sins on earth*, whereupon the multitude that was present *glorified God for having given such power to men*. That Christ, who, as a man, first received this power from His Heavenly Father, imparted it afterward to His Apostles, and to the Pastors of His Church as their lawful successors and His representatives and substitutes on earth, will appear in the sequel of the following discourse, wherein I purpose, with the assistance of God, to treat of the institution and nature of the sacrament of Penance. In the first point I will show you, that penance is a sacrament of divine institution, established by Jesus Christ in the New Law as a necessary means to obtain pardon of the sins committed after baptism. In the

second point, I will lay before you the nature of this sacrament, and the dispositions which must necessarily accompany it. Let us previously implore the light of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of the Blessed Mother of Jesus, greeting her in the words of the Angel Gabriel, *Ave Maria*.

Penance may be considered either as a virtue or as a sacrament. The virtue of penance consists in an inward grief and sorrow of heart for having offended God, with a hatred and detestation of the sins committed, because they are displeasing to God's infinite goodness; it essentially includes a firm purpose of amendment, and a desire or will to satisfy the Divine Justice. Penance in this consideration, or as a virtue only, and its principal act, which is contrition of heart, has been always necessary, even in the Old Law, to obtain the forgiveness of sin, as the Council of Trent says (Sess. 14, c. 4,); but the necessity of the sacrament of Penance only commenced with the promulgation of the Gospel after our Saviour's resurrection, when He raised the virtue of Penance to the dignity of one of the Seven Sacraments of the New Law, and made, as it were, a spiritual bath of the blood He shed on the cross, together with the penitential tears of repenting sinners, for the purpose of washing away the blackest stains of their sins. It is from the merits of His passion and death that it derives this wonderful virtue and efficacy; no sinner is excluded from the benefit of it, let his crimes be ever so enormous, or ever so numerous, provided he has recourse to it with the necessary dispositions; for, as, according to the Gospel of St. John, v., the pond of Jerusalem, called in Latin the *Probatica*, in Hebrew *Bethsaida*, and in Greek *Bethchesda*, that is, the *House of Mercy*, healed the blind, the lame, sick, and infirm of all sorts of distempers whatsoever, when the *Angel of the Lord* descended into it to put the water in motion; so in like manner the sacrament of Penance, which the pond of Jerusalem prefigured, heals all the distempers of a sinful soul, and effaces the penitent's sins, though they should happen to be as red as scarlet, as black as ink, and as numerous as the sands of the sea, when it is duly received and properly applied by the *ministers of the Lord*, and the pastors of the Church.

It is true, the power of forgiving sins properly belongs to God alone, as the power of working miracles belongs only to Him. No one upon earth can therefore forgive sins by his own power or private authority, either in the sacrament of Baptism or of Penance, as no one upon earth can by his own power raise the dead to life; but as God has been often

pleased to communicate the power of raising the dead to life, to men as His instruments, so He has been pleased to communicate to men, as His instruments, the power of forgiving sins in His name, and by His authority. He made Moses, Aaron, Elias, and Elisæus in the Old Law, and the Apostles in the New Law, the instruments of His power to raise the dead to life, and work a great number of stupendous miracles, which surpassed all human power. In like manner He has empowered the pastors of His Church, as His instruments, though they are men and sinners themselves, to absolve and forgive such sinners as truly repent, and have recourse to the tribunal of His mercy with the necessary dispositions. That Christ our Lord solemnly promised to communicate this power to men, is evident from St. Matt. xviii. 18, where He said to His Apostles, and of course to their descendants who were to succeed them in the ministry to the end of time, *Amen, I say to you, Whatsoever you shall bind upon earth, shall be bound also in heaven, and whatsoever you shall loose upon earth, shall be loosed also in heaven.* The same promise He made at another time to St. Peter, the Apostle, in St. Matt. xvi. 19, saying, *To thee I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shall bind on earth, it shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever thou shall loose on earth, shall be loosed also in heaven.* This promise of giving the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, and communicating the power of binding and loosing, was fulfilled by our Blessed Saviour after His resurrection; for, as we read in the Gospel of this day, He appeared to His disciples, and standing in the midst of them, He imparted to them a double blessing of peace, and said, *As my Father has sent me, even so I send you;* that is, I invest you with the same power and authority with which I am invested, and consequently with the power of absolving and forgiving penitent sinners, which Christ undoubtedly had. Then *He breathed upon them*, and said, *Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.* It was then, chiefly, that He instituted Penance as a sacrament of *peace* and reconciliation, to convey into the heart of a Christian penitent that true, solid, and happy *peace*, which is the result of a sincere conversion, and one of the fruits of the *Holy Ghost*. It was then, in short, that the Son of God, committed the power of forgiving sins, not to the persons of the Apostles only, but to their office, that is to them and their successors in office, the Bishops and Priests, who would be duly authorized to exercise the sacred functions of the

ministry after the death of the Apostles ; for as they were not to continue very long upon earth, and as the Church was not to die with them, but to stand unto the very end of the world in defiance of the gates of hell, it is manifest that the commission given to the Apostles was not confined to their persons, but was to descend to their lawful successors, and remain with them until the very end of the world.

In virtue of the commission thus given by Jesus Christ to the pastors of the Church, they remit or retain the sins of those, who, after submitting themselves to the authority of the Church by baptism, humbly submit themselves again to her spiritual jurisdiction, in order to obtain forgiveness of the sins whereby they have defiled the white robe of their innocence, violated the sanctity of their baptism, and transgressed the laws of the Gospel. The sentence of absolution, which is pronounced on this occasion, is to be looked upon as pronounced by God Himself, since everything that is transacted in this sacred tribunal is performed in His name, and by His divine authority. Whilst the priest outwardly exercises the function, and gives the absolution, it is Christ, the invisible High Priest and principal cause of our justification, that interiorly absolves the penitent, forgives him his sins, and grants the inward sanctifying graces that justify him ; for as it is Christ that purifies the soul in baptism by the ministry of the priest, so it is He that purifies the soul in the sacrament of Penance, by the absolution of the priest. It is He that signs and seals our pardon, and ratifies the sentence in heaven, which is imparted to us by His representatives on earth. The power committed to them is therefore so far from being derogatory or injurious to the honor of God, that it redounds very much to his honor and glory, and serves to excite us to a most grateful acknowledgment of His boundless mercy, in having provided us with so effectual a means to make our peace with Him ; it is also so far from promoting sin, or being an encouragement to a sinner to persevere in his iniquity, upon the confidence of being absolved whenever he pleases, that, on the contrary, the Catholic doctrine of absolution, rightly understood, is the greatest curb to sin, puts the severest restraints on corrupt nature, and contributes wonderfully to prevent future relapses, and to promote the practice of virtue ; for though the pastors of the Church have a power to absolve all true penitents, yet they have no power to absolve any sinner, though an emperor or crowned head, unless he sincerely repents of his sins, and has a firm purpose of a new life. They are commanded, under pain of incurring God's indignation, not to cast

the pearls before the swine ; not to administer the holy things to such as continually return, like dogs to their vomit ; not to impart the benefit of absolution to sinners who bring no signs of true repentance, who refuse to make restitution of ill-gotten goods, to repair the injuries they have done to their neighbor, to retract the calumnies they have spread, to shun the dangerous occasions of sin, to forsake their evil habits, or to comply with any part of their duty that binds under pain of mortal sin.

Confession itself is a great and salutary act of self-humiliation, which conduces very much to the reclaiming of sinners, as daily experience teaches, by the great number of conversions which are owing to it. The necessity for confession appears evident, from the commission that Christ gave to the pastors of the Church ; for as He invested them with power to bind and loose, to forgive and retain sins, according to the merits of the cause and the dispositions of the penitents, it follows, by a necessary consequence, that He also laid an obligation upon the faithful to declare their sins, in order to have them remitted or retained ; for, otherwise, how should the pastors of the Church be able to execute this commission, or exercise the power given them ? How should they know what sins are to be forgiven, and what sins are to be retained, unless the sinner be under an obligation of laying open the true state of his soul by a candid confession ? How could they be able to distinguish between leprosy and leprosy ? How could they know what advice is to be given, or what remedy is to be applied, unless they be first informed of the cause, and duly acquainted with the nature of the distemper ? Surely, a judge must have a full knowledge of the cause, and a physician must know the disorder ; the one to pronounce a just sentence, the other to prescribe suitable remedies. Hence St. Augustine says (Homil. 49), that to pretend that it is sufficient to confess to God alone, is to destroy the commission of Christ, who established a penitential court for hearing the sinners' cause, and who constituted the pastors of His Church the judges of men's consciences, and the spiritual physicians of their souls. It is, continues the holy doctor, to contradict the Gospel, and to make void the power of the keys ; because the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, which were given to the Church, would be useless, and the power of retaining sins would be void, if such sins as exclude from the kingdom of Heaven could be readily remitted, independently of the keys given to the Church. May I not then, conclude that penance is justly ranked in the number of the Seven Sacraments of the New Law ? especially, as it appears clearly from what has

been hitherto said, that it has all the requisites to a sacrament, it being *an outward visible, or sensible sign of an inward invisible grace, instituted by Jesus Christ for the sanctification of our souls*, which is the very definition of a sacrament. *The outward visible, or sensible sign*, is found in the penitent's confession, and in the form of absolution on the part of the priest. *The inward invisible grace* thereby signified is the forgiveness of sins; and *the institution of Jesus Christ* is manifest from the Gospel of this day. Let us now briefly consider the nature of this sacrament, and the dispositions that must necessarily accompany it.

Besides the absolution on the part of the minister of Christ, there are three other parts that constitute and complete the sacrament of penance on the penitent's side, namely, *contrition* of the heart, *confession* of the mouth, and *satisfaction* in good works, such as fasting, alms-deeds, and prayer; for as there are three ways of offending God and committing sin—first, by *thoughts*; secondly, by *words*; and, thirdly, by *deeds and actions*—it is both expedient and just that God should be appeased, and that the sins committed against His Divine Majesty should be canceled by three other means: first, by *contrition*, which chiefly consists in thoughts, and resides in the heart; secondly, by *confession*, which is made by word of mouth; and, thirdly, by *satisfaction*, which consists in penitential works and deeds. As to sacramental confession, on which I have already touched, there is no state, no character, no dignity or pre-eminence, that exempts the faithful from this duty. We are all sinners, and in consequence of our sins we are all subject to the same law—the priest as well as the layman, the prince as well as the slave. We do not find in all history an instance of any dispensation ever having been granted in this law, or even having been applied for by the greatest sovereigns or emperors of the earth, which is a further proof that confession is not a human invention, but has been looked upon in all nations, and in all ages, since the days of the Apostles, as a divine institution and precept, wherein the Church has no power to dispense. The writings of the primitive Fathers plainly show that it is as ancient as Christianity itself; nay, even in the Law of Moses, which prefigured the new law of Christ, a special confession of sins was expressly prescribed, as we read in the fifth chapter of the Book of Numbers, although it was not then sacramental. We read also in Leviticus, xiii. that those who were infected with the leprosy, which was a figure of sin, were obliged to show themselves to the priests, and to submit to their judgment, which, according to the remark of the

ancient Fathers, was an emblem of the confession of sins in the sacrament of Penance. For this reason our Blessed Saviour commanded the ten lepers who came to Him to be cured of their leprosy (Luke, xvii.), to go first and show themselves to the priests, giving us thereby to understand that sinners, who are lepers in a mystical sense, must first approach the priests, and lay open the true state of their conscience before their souls can be cleansed and purified from the dangerous leprosy of mortal sin. Hence St. John says (1 Epistle, i. 9), *If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all iniquity.* St. James also, in his Epistle (v. 16), says, *Confess therefore your sins one to another, and pray one for another, that you may be saved.* St. Matthew iii. and St. Mark i. inform us that shoals of proselytes flocked from different parts of Judea to St. John the Baptist, *doing penance and confessing their sins.* It is likewise related in Acts xix. that the first Christians cast themselves at the feet of the Apostles, and confessed the sins they had committed. *Many that believed came and confessed their deeds,* that is, their sins, as St. John Chrysostom expounds it. St. Augustine, (Lib. de Visit. Infirm.) therefore concludes, and says, *If thou wilt have heaven open to thee, open thy mouth in confession to the priest.* St. Cyprian also exhorts all sinners to a timely repentance, and to make an *humble confession of their sins whilst their confession can be admitted, and their satisfaction and the pardon given them by the priests are available with God*; adding, moreover, *that a delusive absolution, given at random, is dangerous to the givers and useless to the receivers.* St. Ambrose, who made the administration of the sacrament of Penance a chief part of his pastoral care, wrote two books on this subject, wherein he explains all the parts and duties of penance; and speaking particularly of the obligation of confessing sins, he says (Lib. 2. c. 6): *If thou wilt be justified, confess thy crime; for an humble confession loosens the bonds of sin.* It is recorded of this holy doctor, that whenever any person confessed their sins to him, he shed such an abundance of tears as to make the penitents also weep and give marks of their inward contrition, without which neither absolution nor confession can have any effect.

The word *contrition* comes from a Latin word that signifies to bruise or break a thing to pieces, and it is metaphorically applied to the heart of a true penitent, because it ought to be, as it were, bruised and broken asunder with grief and affliction for having sinned against the

Lord. Contrition is generally defined *an inward sorrow of the heart for having offended so good a God, with a hatred and detestation of sin, and a firm resolution to sin no more.* There are two sorts of contrition, perfect and imperfect. Though we are to aim at perfect contrition, yet it is not essentially necessary with the sacramental absolution ; it is a singular grace of God, which few attain to. Such was the contrition of King David, of Mary Magdalen, of St. Peter, and some other Scripture penitents. The Roman Catechism says that *it is very rare and difficult* to find the like contrition now-a-days, *amidst the many vicissitudes of this life, and incentives of vice that daily occur*—Part 2, c. 5. The necessary qualities and condition of that contrition which is to accompany confession are these four : First, it must be *interior*, or conceived and formed in the heart, which must hate and detest sin because it offends God. Second, it must be *supernatural*, and proceed from the grace of God, moving the penitent's soul by some motives of religion. Third, it must be *sovereign*, that is, above every other sorrow of the heart, as sin is above, or greater than any other evil. Fourth, it must be *universal*, or general, and extend itself to every mortal sin, without exception, that the penitent is guilty of, since he cannot be truly sorry for one, and hate it as being injurious and offensive to God, without being sorry for the other and hating it for the same reason. It is not sufficient to be sorry for sin, because it exposes the sinner to some worldly shame, scandal, and disgrace, or because it has brought on him temporal misfortunes, losses, and disorders. Such a sorrow is merely natural, and no way relative to God, like the sorrow of a malefactor, who by his misdemeanors has brought himself to a shameful and untimely end. A person who never heard a word of the Christian religion may repent upon the same motive ; nay, the damned souls in hell repent, and are very sorry for their past sins on this account. A true gospel penitent must have a penitential abhorrence and detestation of sin, because it is displeasing to God's infinite goodness. He must love God as the fountain of justice, and detest sin for His sake, because it is offensive to His divine majesty ; for, as St. Augustine says (Serm. 7, de Temp.): *Nothing renders a repentance certain but a love of God, and a hatred of sin.* From contrition there springs a firm purpose of amendment ; for, as a learned writer observes, contrition has two faces : with the one it looks back at the sins already committed, and laments them with an aching heart ; with the other it looks forward, and regards the time to come with a sincere resolution

and fixed determination of the will to sin no more, and of course to shun all the dangerous and immediate occasions that dispose unto mortal sin, either of their own nature, or by reason of a peculiar weakness of temper that is easily wrought upon. Hence St. Augustine says, *If thou art penitent, be sorry for what thou hast done ; if thou art sorry for it, do it no more, because if thou continuest to do it, thou art not penitent.* A sincere penitent considers himself to be much in the same condition of a person newly recovered out of a very heavy fit of sickness, who is therefore obliged to continue a regular diet and exercise for fear of a relapse ; he regards his own infirm will like a torch that is newly blown out, and that may easily take fire and flame again with every blast of wind. This determines him to fly from whatever he foresees will be the cause of his spiritual ruin with the same apprehension and care that a child dreads the fire that once burned him, and that a prudent mariner shuns the rocks, shelves, and quicksands on which he was once shipwrecked.

Satisfaction, in fine, which is the third part of the sacrament of Penance, springs also from the very substance and nature of contrition. By it is meant the faithful performance of the penitential works which are enjoined by the priest in the sacred tribunal, in order to repair the effects of sin, to prevent its return, to satisfy the divine justice, and atone for the temporal punishment due to sin, even after it is remitted, both as to the guilt and eternal punishment. The actual performance of these good works belongs only to the integrity of the sacrament of Penance, and is necessary to render it complete ; but the intention, will, or desire of performing them is essentially included in a true repentance, which, like unto a good tree, is known by the fruits it produces.

O Father of mercies, and God of all consolation, grant us the gift of such a repentance, that we may reap the benefit of Thy divine institution, and partake of the manifold graces which Thou hast annexed to it. O may we never be so ungrateful to Thee, or so blind to our own spiritual welfare, as to slight and neglect this powerful means of salvation, or continue wallowing in the mire of iniquity, when we have so favorable an opportunity to effect the great work of our reconciliation with Thee. We throw ourselves this day at the feet of Thy mercy, like the penitent Magdalen, and most humbly beseech Thee to pardon our past irregularities, and preserve us from future relapses, that persevering unto the end of our life in Thy love and service, we may have

the happiness to see and enjoy Thee hereafter in the kingdom of Heaven for a never-ending eternity. Which I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

ON THE DANGERS AND DIFFICULTIES OF A DELAYED CONVERSION.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. Introduction on the goodness of Christ and the danger of postponing conversion.
- II. Postponement renders a sinner's conversion more difficult.
- III. It sometimes makes it, in a manner, impossible.
- IV. Conclusion, with an earnest appeal for the conversion of sinners.

Ego sum pastor bonus.—*St. Jo. c. x. v. 11.*

I am the Good Shepherd—*St. John, c. x. v. 11.*

THE Redeemer of the World makes use of the most endearing expressions to mollify the stony hearts of sinners, and to reclaim them from their evil ways. One time He compares Himself to an affectionate father, embracing the prodigal child with open arms; another time to a tender-hearted mother; another time to a hen gathering her chickens together, and cherishing them under her wings. In the Gospel of this day He compares Himself to a good shepherd that gives his life for his flock, and he lays before us the properties of a good shepherd, to convince us that He is as solicitous to procure our salvation, and to preserve us from destruction, as the most vigilant shepherd is to protect his flock from the incursion of the wolves. Nothing can be more consoling, nothing more engaging than His affectionate language, which the Lord our God has been pleased to make use of in Holy Writ, in order to invite sinners to repentance. Though He is all-sufficient in Himself, and finds the completest happiness in the contemplation of His own excellency and infinite perfections, yet He expresses for us the same concern as if His felicity was connected with, and dependent on our services. The dignity of Sovereign Lord and Master disappears, to make room for the tender solicitude of a loving father and a good pastor. His only care seems to be the securing of our eternal welfare, even

to the prejudice of His own interest ; but what is most astonishing, is the little regard that is generally paid to His merciful invitations. His threats and promises are treated alike. Sinners run on blindly in the broad road of everlasting perdition, and entangle themselves in a labyrinth of criminal disorders, without the least apprehension of that dreadful punishment which is reserved for them in the next world, during the whole length of a never-ending eternity. The Almighty calls upon them to repent ; He presses and solicits them to renounce their evil ways ; He invites them to have recourse to the throne of mercy without delay, and yet, alas ! as if they were determined to tire His patience and wear out His mercy, they are deaf to His calls, and procrastinate their repentance from day to day. They slight His sweet invitations to conversion, and refuse to forsake their sins upon a presumptuous confidence and reliance on His unbounded mercy. In short, they remit their conversion to old age, when the ardor of their youthful passions will be abated ; and they flatter themselves with the notion, that they will have time enough to think of doing penance in their last sickness, or on their death-bed, when they are glutted with the alluring pleasures of sense, weary of walking in the paths of iniquity, and no longer able to commit sin. Hence arise their disorders and misfortunes. But to destroy these most pernicious illusions by two simple and natural propositions, I will endeavor to show you that nothing is more dangerous than to defer repentance from day to day, and live in disgrace with God upon a project of repenting in the end ; first, because it is the way to render the sinner's conversion always more difficult ; and secondly, because it is the way to render it sometimes in a manner impossible. Behold the entire plan of the following discourse, and the subject of your favorable attention. Let us previously implore the assistance of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of the Blessed Mother of Jesus, &c. *Ave Maria.*

There is not, there cannot be, a more dangerous illusion, than to persist wilfully in the unhappy state of sin, and put off your conversion from day to day upon a project of repenting in the end of your life. First, because a sudden and unforeseen accident may prevent the very possibility of your repenting at that critical period, and cast your souls in the twinkling of an eye into hell's unquenchable flames. Human nature, which in other respects is so fond of itself, would appear almost incapable of a stupidity so unreasonable, and of an insensibility so deplorable, if sad experience did not prove that even in the very midst of

Christianity there are many, too many, to be found, who, upon the confidence of a future conversion, continue whole years together in the dismal state of, perhaps, as many mortal sins in thought, word, and deed as they have hairs on their head, though it is an article of their faith, that if they have the misfortune to be surprised by a sudden and unprovided death whilst they are under the guilt of one single mortal sin unrepented, it alone is sufficient to render them liable to eternal damnation, and to strike their names forever out of the book of life. One would imagine that this consideration alone should deter a Christian from living one hour in a bad state, where heaven and eternity are at stake, and in manifest danger of being irreparably lost. We came into the world when it pleased the Almighty, and we must leave it when he thinks proper. We know not the day, nor the hour, nor the minute, for He has confined the knowledge of it to Himself; every moment may be our last, and we have but a mere *perhaps* that the ensuing instant may not be for us the beginning of our eternity. Is it not, then, my brethren, a monstrous presumption to promise ourselves that we will live to do penance in old age, as if we were masters of the time to come, and really acquainted with the secrets of futurity? Is it not an insupportable insolence, a glaring injustice, and the most barefaced ingratitude, thus to appoint and reserve the last, the least, and the worst part of our life for the service of our most bountiful Creator, after so many signal benefits received, and so many solemn promises of giving us the kingdom of Heaven as a recompense for our fidelity? Is it not, in fine, the very height of insensibility, and of cruelty, to our own souls, thus to expose them to the imminent danger of losing God and His glory, and of being condemned to burn in flames of fire with merciless devils for all eternity? Alas! how many thousands of unhappy souls are now burning in hell, who in their lifetime had as little notion of damning themselves and dying in their sins as any sinner in this congregation has! They presumptuously delayed their conversion from day to day, from week to week, from month to month, from year to year, as I fear some of you unfortunately do, until at length by a just judgment of God they were suddenly cut off the face of the earth when they least expected it, and hurried away to the bar of Divine Justice, without having time to make a single act of contrition, or implore forgiveness of their sins. How many terrifying examples do we read in Holy Writ, and in Church history, of such sinners, who in an instant were thus snatched away in the very bloom of life, by lightning, earthquakes, paralytic

strokes, apoplexies, suffocations, or the like unexpected accidents ; whilst they relied on the appearance of a flourishing constitution, and flattered themselves with a long series of prosperous years. Whilst they were pursuing their worldly projects, and forming to themselves imaginary schemes of a future repentance, death having suddenly overtaken them in their full career, blasted all their presumptuous expectations, and, in just punishment of their final impenitence, they were sentenced to that bottomless pit of endless woe, where, as the Scripture says, *their worm will never die, and their fire will never be extinguished*. Thus it is that the Lord threatens to serve those who shut their ears to his sweet calls, slight his graces, abuse his mercy, and provoke his justice, by putting off their conversion. *They are surprised in the evil day*, says Ecclesiasticus, and caught unawares, like unto a fish that is caught with the fisherman's hook, and swallows the bait instead of nourishment, at the very time that it is basking in the water ; or like unto a bird which is suddenly entangled in the fowler's net the very moment that it is singing and diverting itself and others with its melodious notes, without the least apprehension of danger. Hence the wise man exhorts all sinners in the following words : *Delay not to be converted to the Lord, and defer it not from day to day, for his wrath shall come on a sudden, and in the time of vengeance he will destroy thee*—Eccles. v. 8. Unless, therefore, my brethren, the loss of your God, the loss of His heavenly kingdom, and the eternal ruin of your immortal souls, be objects below your concern, you will conclude with me that nothing is more dangerous than to put off your conversion, and of course you will seek the Lord your God by a speedy and sincere repentance, whenever you unhappily lose Him and His sanctifying grace by any mortal sin. It is a most dreadful thing to be an enemy of God, though it were only for one day, or a single night ; for which reason you should never suffer any considerable time to intervene between your fall and your rise, lest, perhaps, when you close your eyes to sleep, you may never uncloseth again, or awake and return to your senses, but to view the infernal regions of the damned, and to feel unspeakable torments. What has happened to thousands of sinners may equally happen to you, and it is both your interest and duty to grow wise at their expense, rather than by your own woeful experience. If you have your eternal salvation at heart, you will follow the counsel of the Holy Ghost, who advises you to be *mindful of your Creator in the days of your youth*, and to *fly immediately from sin, as from the face of a venomous serpent* ; you

will not neglect the means of salvation in time of health, or persevere in sin upon a project of repenting in old age, when the heat of your youthful passions is over. To defer your conversion to old age is the way to render it always more difficult, and to multiply obstacles; for such is the fatal prerogative of sin, as St. George remarks, that when it is not washed off by a speedy repentance, one sin naturally procreates and draws on another, which makes the sinner's case grow worse and worse every day, and removes him at a greater distance from God, and from the way of salvation, insomuch that he that is not fit to repent to-day will be less fit to-morrow. Every new sin adds a new link to the chain that holds him in bondage, and affords the devil a fresh opportunity to fortify himself more strongly in his soul. By a continuance in sin he gradually contracts an evil habit, which takes deeper root every day, until at length, in process of time, it grows into second nature, and, like old diseases, it becomes almost incurable. This made holy Job say, *that the very bones of an old inveterate sinner shall be replenished with the crimes of his youth, and that they shall sleep with him in the grave.* This made St. Augustine compare such sinners to so many Lazaruses, who are not to be raised to the life of grace without great difficulties and many tears.

What folly it is, then, my brethren, to defer your conversion to old age, when so many obstacles and impediments will be multiplied, and so many criminal habits and engagements will be contracted, that even though you should have a sincere desire of repenting then, they will be capable of deterring you from undertaking so arduous an enterprise! If, at present, in your perfect health, it seems difficult to do penance—to fast, to pray, to mortify yourselves, and practice those good works which the Church enjoins repenting sinners—how will you do it in old age, when the body requires to be cherished rather than chastised? If you find it unpleasant, after three or four years' disobedience to the laws of God and His Church, to resist your passions, and root out from your hearts the love of those favorite sins and darling vices which have defiled your souls, what will it be when twenty years more are added to the account? How will you be able to discharge the weighty obligations which the guilt of so many years requires? Who can assure you that the time to come will be as favorable for your conversion as the present time? Many sinners have attained to old age, and died then like stupid logs, or dumb and senseless beasts, according to the expression of St. Gregory; for as they forgot God in their lifetime, so by a

just judgment they are suffered to forget themselves at the hour of death, and to die as they lived, without any serious thought of doing penance and making a provision for a happy eternity. Being daunted at the sight of so many obstacles and difficulties which they have to surmount, they are sometimes tempted to give themselves up to despair, and, like unhappy Cain, to think their crimes too grievous to be ever forgiven. Moreover, it frequently happens that they are then deprived of the use of their reason by a malignant fever, or some other violent distemper. Under these circumstances repentance is rendered in a manner impossible ; they are not in a condition to partake of the favorable supports of religion, and of course the holy sacraments of reconciliation, which are so beneficial to others, become useless and unprofitable to them. Thus it is that the justice of God often punishes, by a subtraction of his gracious favors, those who in their health abuse his mercy as an encouragement to sin, and reserve for him only the ruins and dregs of old age, after spending the flower of their life and the best of their days in the pursuit of vice and in the service of the devil. But let us suppose that they retain the use of their reason, and cry out in their perfect senses for the assistance of a clergyman in their last illness, I still contend for it, that a late repentance, or a death-bed conversion, is so dangerous, so deceitful, so uncertain, and attended with so many difficulties, that nothing but a groundless and insupportable presumption can induce sinners to flatter themselves with the notion of it. The very situation renders them incapable of making any regular preparation, or disposing their souls for receiving the last sacraments worthily ; for how is it possible that a poor unfortunate sinner, who for a long series of years has been a stranger to every Christian virtue, and a slave to every fashionable vice, and who has deferred his repentance to the last hour, should be able to accomplish so great a work properly, when he is struggling between life and death ? How will he be able to examine his conscience, and to recount the crimes of a life entirely spent in the neglect of every duty, and in a total oblivion of God and of his salvation ? Penance, according to the holy fathers, is a *laborious baptism*, that requires great violence and rude mortifications ; it is a bread of sorrow and tears, with which a true penitent must be nourished ; and, as the Council of Trent observes, God's grace, forfeited after baptism, is not to be recovered without great labors and many penitential tears. It usually costs those who are in perfect health much time and labor to work themselves into the necessary dispositions of a

Gospel penitent, and to disengage their hearts from sinful affections of a long growth. We may judge, then, how unequal a sinner must be for so arduous a task, when he is seized all over with a mortal anguish, and besieged on all sides with the pangs and agonies of an approaching dissolution. When he comes to that extremity, he is not, commonly, so sensible of his guilt, nor so efficaciously touched with the remorse of a sincere sorrow for his past crimes, as he is distracted with the terrors of death, and the dark visionary apprehensions of the awful judgment which is immediately to ensue. The pains and agonies, both of mind and body, together with the heaviness and stupidity caused by his sickness, are enough to disqualify him, in a great measure, from applying seriously to the important affair of his soul's eternal salvation. His thoughts will at that time run to the place where the force of his pain and the violence of his disorder lies. Many other obstacles and impediments will occur then, such as the sight of a disconsolate wife, of weeping children and friends, the flattery of the world, the hopes of recovery with which he is deceived, the desire of life, and the temptations of the devil, who at that critical period is most active to procure his eternal perdition. May I not, then, justly say, that no time is more unfit or more improper for sinners to begin their conversion? In that extremity, generally speaking, they only part with their sins as sailors in the midst of a violent tempest part with the cargo of a ship, to fish it up again when the storm is over. Everything is done in a hurry and with precipitation. The rites of the Church are hastily administered by the attending clergyman, because they were deferred to the last extremity, and the case is pressing and will admit of no further delay. In fine, some outward signs of repentance are, perhaps, given by the dying sinner, and thus he launches into eternity, to appear before the tremendous tribunal of his Sovereign Judge. But all these exterior performances and appearances, however favorable they may seem in the eyes of the world, will avail him no more in the sight of the all-seeing God, unless they be accompanied with the interior sorrow and conversion of the heart, than the like outward appearance of repentance formerly availed the unfortunate King Antiochus, who, as we read in the second book of Machabees, obtained no mercy, but died in his sins, and was eternally lost, because his heart was not truly changed and converted, though he implored forgiveness with sighs and tears in his last extremity.

However, the greatest profligate on earth should never despair, but

should employ his last moments in preparing for a happy death. If he be so unfortunate as to have his repentance to begin at the end of his life, he ought to do all that is then in his power, and endeavor to bewail his past sins in the bitterness of his soul, with an entire confidence in the merits of his Blessed Redeemer and the unbounded mercies of God, who never rejects a contrite and humble heart. But as no one is to despair, so no one is to presume, or to defer his repentance, and continue in sin to the end of his life, because God is gracious and merciful ; for, as St. Gregory says, *he who has promised mercy and pardon to those that truly repent, has never promised the grace of a true repentance to those who defer it.* On the contrary, the Divine mercy, when slighted, abused, and despised, turns at length into indignation, and defeats the wicked policy and insolence of those presumptuous sinners who reject its gracious offers, and think only of leaving sin when sin leaves them. Harken to what the Lord says (Proverbs i. 24) : *Because I called, and you refused : I stretched out my hand, and there was none that regarded. You have despised all my counsel, and have neglected my reprehensions. I also will laugh in your destruction, and will mock when that shall come to you which you feared.* And again, in St. John vii. : *You shall seek me, and shall not find me, and you shall die in your sins.*

After such a dreadful sentence, will you say, my brethren, that it is never too late to repent. Will you continue to offend God as long as you are able, and resolve only to make your peace with Him when you are tired of the world, and no longer able to gratify your passions ? Do not those sinners justly deserve to be abandoned by God at the hour of death who abandoned Him in their lifetime, and only intend to return to Him when their souls are defiled all over with sin, and their bodies worn out with drunkenness, intemperance, and debauchery ? Do they not deserve to be disappointed who expect to go to Heaven by walking on boldly in the direct road that leads to hell and everlasting perdition ? Is it to be supposed that a sinful life, thus willfully continued, will terminate in a happy death ? No, says the great Augustine, *for men generally die as they live ; and he seldom dies well who lived ill.* And, again, in his Exposition of Psalm liv. : *The penence that is done by a sick man is sick ; and that which is done by a dying man, I fear, is also dead ;* for though a true repentance never comes too late, yet a late repentance, or a death-bed conversion, is seldom or ever true and sincere. In the whole Scripture we have but one instance in favor

of a late repentance, namely, that of the good thief on the cross, an example so singular in all its circumstances that it should by no means encourage sinners to trust to a late repentance, or venture their eternal salvation upon so desperate an issue as a death-bed conversion, especially since, to counterbalance this extraordinary instance of God's mercy, they have a most terrifying instance of Divine justice in the other thief, who at the same time was suffered to die in his sins, and to descend from the temporal punishment of the cross, and from the very side of Jesus Christ, into the eternal torments of hell. May God of his infinite mercy preserve every one here from the like misfortune ; and it is with this view I come this day to apprise you, in the name of the living God, that the only time you can depend on for accomplishing the great work of your reconciliation is the present time, when you are in health, and capable of applying the proper means, and whilst the sun of grace and mercy shines, and the arms of your crucified Redeemer are open, to embrace those who return to him in the sincerity of their hearts.

If, therefore, there should happen to be any sinners in this congregation whose consciences fly in their faces, and tell them that they have been straying away these several years past from the narrow path of salvation, and turning their backs upon God and His Church, neglecting the holy sacraments, and involving themselves deeper and deeper in the mire of iniquity, and in the criminal habits of cursing, swearing, blaspheming, drunkenness, injustice, debauchery, or the like detestable vices; O let me entreat them to sleep no longer unconcerned on the brink of hell, and in the arms of perdition, but to repent in time, that they may not have reason hereafter to repent in vain for all eternity in the flames of hell. Let me beseech them, without any further loss of time, to shake off the galling yoke of the devil, and to banish from the temple of their souls those favorite vices and foul monsters of sin which they have hitherto cherished in their breasts, to the great contempt and injury of the Lord their God. Let me remind them that the more time they lose, and the longer they put off their conversion, the worse their case will grow every day, the greater difficulties will arise, the more their evil habits will be strengthened, the more unworthy they will render themselves of the gracious favors of Heaven, and the greater risk they will run of having the gate of mercy eternally shut in their face. Let me, in fine, exhort them with apostolic words *to hasten with confidence to the throne of Divine grace*, to throw themselves with humility at the feet of God's mercy without further delay, to acknowledge their

past ingratitude with sorrow, and to implore forgiveness with a firm purpose of sinning no more. Grant us all this grace, O Father of mercies and Giver of all good gifts. Thou hast declared that thou *desirest not the death of a sinner, but that he be converted and live*. Convert us, then, O Lord, and we shall be converted. Prostrate at thy feet, we resolve from this moment to arise from the profound lethargy of sin. Vouchsafe, we beseech thee, to assist us herein. Deliver us from the tyranny of our passions, and break asunder the chains of our evil habits, which have enslaved us so long. Mollify our hardened hearts, and melt them into tears of compunction, that our souls being purified in the waters of penance from the foul stains of sin, we may be admitted one day into the eternal mansions of bliss, which thou, O loving Jesus, hast purchased for us by the effusion of Thy precious blood, and which, my dear brethren, I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

ON THE HABIT OF SIN.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. The habit of sin and its frequency.
- II. Dangers and difficulties in habitual sin.
- III. Three means of overcoming them.
- IV. An encouraging appeal to sinners.

Qui facit peccatum servus est peccati.—*St. Jo. c. viii. v. 34.*

He who committeth sin is the servant of sin.—*St. John, c. viii. v. 34.*

To be a slave to sin is a dreadful servitude, a deplorable bondage and captivity. It is to be a slave to a cruel tyrant and to the most dangerous enemy of our salvation, an enemy that is intent on nothing less than our utter ruin, and the loss of our souls. It is to be a slave to an enemy that robs us of God and His grace, that divests us of all right to Heaven, and exposes us to the evident danger of perishing for all eternity. Such is the formidable enemy that sinners are enslaved by, especially when they have contracted a habit of sin by frequently relapsing into it. Of such unfortunate sinners we may affirm, in the language of the Scripture, that they are *tied with the cords of sin*, bound with

the fetters of iniquity, and pass their days in a miserable bondage. Vice gains an absolute ascendancy and dominion over them ; it becomes through custom a second nature, and reduces them to a kind of necessity of servilely obeying all its commands, and submitting to its tyrannical laws.

How many sad examples do we daily see of this fatal necessity in drunkards, cursers, swearers, blasphemers, lechers, and other habitual sinners, who miserably groan whole years together under the chains of their favorite vices? They are frequently galled with the dreadful weight, and even resolve to shake off the burden, but they have not courage or strength even when they seem to have a mind. They fail in the attempt, and scarce advance one step toward a reformation of life when they are overpowered by a vicious habit, and relapse into the same heinous crimes. To make you thoroughly sensible, my brethren, of the dangerous state and deplorable servitude of such relapsing and habitual sinners ; to caution you against the fatal consequences and misfortunes that are incurred by a long habit of relapsing, and to prescribe suitable remedies against such dreadful evils, is the design of the following discourse. The dangers and difficulties that a habit of sin involves a sinner in shall be the subject of my first point. The means to overcome these difficulties shall be the subject of the second. Let us previously implore the divine assistance, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, &c. *Ave Maria.*

Although mankind has a strong propensity to evil, yet few plunge themselves headlong into the gulf of vice at once, or become completely wicked on a sudden ; for, as virtue has its degrees, by which men ascend gradually to the height of perfection, vice, in like manner, has certain degrees, by which they descend into the abyss of iniquity. One crime not speedily washed off by a sincere repentance, as St. Gregory observes, naturally leads the sinner on to another, till a vicious habit is gradually formed by sinful acts, several times repeated. When a habit of sin is thus contracted, it begets a kind of second nature, which, as St. Augustine says, in Ps. xxx., is only to be overcome by painful and tedious conflicts ; for every one knows how deeply our natural inclinations are rooted in the soul, how strongly the weight of concupiscence influences the heart of a sinner and bends it to vice, and what a wonderful force it gives to every habit that seconds the vicious inclinations of nature. To surmount a habit of this sort is a work of time that requires much labor and hardship. It is, indeed, easy to dislodge sin

and to stop its progress in the beginning, when first it gains admittance into the soul, as it is easy to bend a tender twig, or to pull up a young tree lately planted ; but as a strong grown tree, that has cast deep roots into the earth, is not to be cut down with one stroke of an ax, or to be removed without much labor and difficulty, so, in like manner, sin, that is strengthened by time, and becomes habitual by repeated relapses, is not to be rooted up and overthrown but by the most vigorous efforts.

It is difficult to cure a leg or an arm that has been often fractured, or to cleanse and sweeten a vessel that has been infected for a long time with some putrid matter. Judge, then, what pains and labor it must cost to heal and purify the soul of a sinner habituated in vice, and infected with a long train of sinful disorders. If relapses into bodily distempers be more dangerous, more fatal, and harder to be cured than the former disorder, it is easy to conceive how frequent relapses into sin render the case of an habitual sinner continually worse and more desperate, according to these words of the Gospel (Luke xi.) : *The last state of that man becomes worse than the first.* His wounds, by being neglected, gradually fester and mortify, and his spiritual maladies, by a long continuance, become at length almost incurable, and usually terminate in the eternal death of his soul.

What renders the state of relapsing sinners so dangerous, and their conversion so extremely difficult, is, because the ordinary means whereby God recalls sinners to repentance become useless to them, through their own negligence, obstinacy, and perverseness ; they either totally neglect the holy sacraments, or approach them without the necessary dispositions. The habit of sin gives them a distaste for exercises of piety and spiritual duties ; it stifles all the remorseness of conscience, and renders them insensible to the most enormous crimes, and, as the Scripture phrase expresses it, it makes them *swallow down iniquity as water*, without reluctance. Every relapse removes them at a greater distance from God, and renders them more unworthy of His grace, as it implies a more barefaced contempt of His divine majesty, a greater abuse of His mercy, a blacker ingratitude, a baser treachery and perfidiousness. Every fresh crime they commit adds a new link to the chain that holds them in bondage, and consequently puts a fresh obstacle to their conversion. The devil, ever jealous of his prey, is, in the interim, continually gaining ground and acquiring an addition of power over them, until at length, by a long habit of relapsing, they establish his tyrannical dominion over them in such a manner, and strengthen their own

fetters to that degree, that they will not have the courage or resolution to shake off his galling yoke without the help of an extraordinary grace, which they have no reason to expect. Hence the Gospel compares the relapsing and habitual sinner to a man, who, after having been dispossessed of one devil, opens his heart for him again, and becomes the dwelling-place of seven other devils more wicked than the former.

The force of a vicious habit appeared visibly in the great Augustine. O what struggles, what interior conflicts, what violent combat, what sighs and tears did it not cost him, before he was able to dissolve his criminal engagements, and extricate himself from that sad captivity to which he had been reduced by a habit of sin? Hear himself bewailing the disorders of his past life—Conf. l. 8, c. 5. Alas! says he, I was tied, but by whom? By my own will, which grew as hard as iron. The devil became absolute master of it, and led it as he pleased; he made of a criminal passion a heavy chain, with which he held me fast, and from which I could not disengage myself. O sad captivity! continues the holy penitent. O strange servitude! I complained of it, and yet I loved it; I was willing to be released from it, and I was, notwithstanding, still desirous to remain in it; I made some efforts to abandon vice, but the efforts I made were like unto the feeble efforts of a man in a slumber, who is willing to get out of bed, and for this purpose now and then raises his head, but instantly falls back, overpowered by sleep, and benumbed with drowsiness, even when he has a mind to arise, and when reason tells him it is high time. In this perplexity of mind, says the renowned penitent, my heart broke out into sighs, and my eyes were bathed with tears. I retired alone to weep, and then my tears flowed in abundance. I addressed myself to Heaven, and cried out: How long, O Lord, how long shall I be governed by a cruel passion, and when will that happy moment come in which I shall see myself delivered from it? To-morrow—to-morrow. Why not this day? Why not this hour? Why do I not put an end to my criminal excesses this very instant? Such was the painful and tedious conflict of the great Augustine with the habit of sin! It is true, he triumphed over it at length; but how? By a miracle in the order of grace. His conversion was the effect of the all-powerful voice of God, which the very dead obey, and without which he never would have gained over himself so complete a victory. Hence the illustrious penitent, perceiving a happy and unexpected change in himself, and filled with sentiments of gratitude,

joy, and admiration, repeatedly cried out : *O God of mercy, my chains are broken, may Thou be blessed for ever. O my God, let my heart burn incessantly with the love of Thee, and let my tongue still utter Thy praises, as a grateful acknowledgment for Thy inexpressible favors.*

So true it is, my brethren, that the conversion of an habitual sinner is a most difficult task, that costs much labor and pains, and requires singular and extraordinary efforts. St. John Chrysostom did not hesitate to say, that it is a greater work than the raising of a dead man to life. Hence our Blessed Saviour, who disposed all things according to the views of His adorable wisdom, not only intended to give the Jews a proof of His divinity, when He raised the dead to life, but also was willing that the visible miracles, which He wrought in their favor, should serve to represent the invisible miracle that is wrought by His divine grace, in the spiritual resurrection of a sinner from the death of mortal sin. The Gospel only makes mention of three persons whom He visibly raised from the dead, and these three, according to St. Augustine, were figures of three different classes of sinners. The first he raised was the daughter of a prince or ruler of the Jewish synagogue—Matt. ix. The second was the son of the widow of Naim—St. Luke, vii. The third was Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary—John, xi. When He raised the prince's daughter, he no sooner took hold of her hand, and said, *Girl, arise*, than she came immediately to life again. When He raised the widow's son He did something more ; He stopped the multitude ; He went over and touched the bier on which the corpse was carried ; He spoke three or four words, and commanded the dead man to rise up in the presence of his mother and friends, who were escorting him to the grave ; but when He raised Lazarus, he not only spoke, but raised His voice aloud, and cried out, *Lazarus, come forth* ; He lifted up His eyes to Heaven, He prayed, He wept, He sighed, He was troubled more than usual, and gave all the marks of an action that required a singular effort, and an extraordinary power. It may appear somewhat strange that Christ our Lord should act so differently in raising these three dead persons to life ; but St. Augustine unravels the mystery by teaching us that the difference of their resurrection marks out to us the different operations of divine grace in the conversion of different sorts of sinners, whose spiritual resurrection was prefigured by their corporal resurrection, as their corporal death represented the deplorable effects of sin, and the dismal state of a sinner. The daughter of the prince

of the synagogue had but just expired that instant. To raise her again to life cost our Saviour no great trouble or pains ; no extraordinary miracle was necessary. The widow's son was farther gone ; he was not only dead, but also laid upon a bier, and carried out in order to be buried. To restore him to life was a work of more absolute power, for which reason our Blessed Saviour made use of His authority, and commanded him to rise up ; but Lazarus was already four days dead, interred and corrupted ; his hands and feet were tied with bandages, his head was bound with a napkin, and his monument was covered with a stone of great magnitude. To bring him to life was a more difficult task. Nothing less than an extraordinary miracle was necessary ; nothing less than a vigorous effort and exertion of the Almighty power of the Son of God was required. The first of these three represents such souls as have but just fallen into sin. It is a more easy matter to restore them to the life of grace. The second represents such as are not only spiritually dead by sin, but are also laid, as it were, upon a bier, and carried away by their criminal passions toward the grave of a sinful habit ; stronger graces are required for the raising of them. But Lazarus represents the dismal state of the relapsing and habitual sinner, whose conversion is attended with uncommon difficulties.

Lazarus was a figure of those inveterate sinners, those notorious cursers, swearers, lechers, &c. who lie dead and buried in the habit of mortal sin as in a grave, and that not for four days only, but perhaps four years, nay, ten, twenty, or thirty years, communicating the contagion of their vices to others, and infecting them by their scandalous example. The bandages with which the hands and feet of Lazarus were tied represent the chains and fetters of sin with which they are bound ; the stone that covered his grave represents the weight of a long sinful habit under which they labor, and which presses them down to the earth with such force, that St. Augustine cries out : *O how difficult is it for him to rise, who is pressed down by the weight of an evil habit ?* In fine, all the different circumstances wherein the Gospel represents Lazarus to have been before his resurrection, denote the dismal state and deplorable bondage of habitual sinners, and the difficulties that obstruct their spiritual resurrection ; they are, as St. Augustine speaks, so many Lazaruses, not to be raised to the life of grace without many tears, and a prodigious miracle of the grace of Jesus Christ. It was for them that Christ was troubled at the sight of Lazarus's tomb ; it was for them He then sighed and wept. For what was more deserving of the tears

of the Son of God, says St. Augustine, than a soul created after the image of God, but become a slave of the devil by mortal sin ! What subject more capable of drawing tears from the eyes of Jesus Christ, than to behold what He ransomed at the expense of His precious blood, enveloped in criminal engagements, and buried in the habit of sin, in the very centre of perdition !

The habitual sinner, reduced to this situation, falls by degrees into a kind of insensibility, that paves the way to final impenitence. When he first fell into sin, he blushed and was ashamed of his weakness ; his conscience was alarmed at his misfortune ; but when he has often relapsed into the same crime, and suffered a habit to be formed, he no longer feels any pain, trouble, or inquietude. *Omne peccatum consuetudine vilescit*, says St. Augustine ; he is a profound tranquillity, though he is an enemy to God, and a slave to the devil, liable every instant to become a victim to the scorching flames of hell. The fire of charity being extinguished in his soul, his heart grows as hard as a rock, says St. Gregory. It is hardened, says St. Augustine, like water which is changed into ice in the winter, when the sun withdraws its brilliant rays from it. The best advices have no more effect on him than drops of water have on a stone ; they may, indeed, by falling frequently, make some little cavities, or some superficial impression, but will not effect his conversion. A zealous preacher may, perhaps, strike out of the flinty heart of such a sinner a sigh, a tear, a feeble desire of repentance ; he may extort some fair promises of amendment ; he may work him into some pious resolutions ; but, alas ! instead of executing them, he will fly back again at the first temptation, and gratify the vice to which he is a slave. He may, perhaps, sometimes say within himself, as Sampson did when he found himself in captivity among the Philistines, I will disengage and extricate myself from this bondage ; but if he attempts, he sinks like that unfortunate prince of Israel, under the weight of his chains. He finds himself so entangled and involved in such a deplorable servitude, that he has neither courage, resolution, or strength to break the fetters into which he has thrown himself by a constant custom of relapsing. I have now laid before you the dangerous state, and the deplorable servitude of an habitual and relapsing sinner, in order to deter you against the like misfortune. You have heard what difficulties a vicious habit opposes to his conversion. Let us briefly consider the means to overcome these difficulties. This is the subject of the second point, which I shall reduce to a few words.

The force of infinite power is not less visible, says the Apostle, in the conversion of sinners, than in the resurrection of the dead ; for it is the same wonderful power of God that restores the dead to life, and that raises the sinner from the death of sin to the life of grace. I find only this difference, that the all-powerful voice of God, which penetrates to the bottom of the deepest abyss, and which calls the dead from the grave, meets with no resistance in a dead body, into which it diffuses life and motion ; whereas the sinner, whose soul is dead by sin, seems to retain some remains of his former strength and vigor only to resist and oppose this voice, which can call and raise him from the gulf of vice, and from that abyss of iniquity in which he lies plunged. Notwithstanding, how difficult soever the conversion of such a sinner may be, it is still possible, and he may yet become a vessel of election. He is, therefore, never to despair, like unhappy Judas and wicked Cain, but rather to confide, like the penitent Magdalen, and have immediate recourse to the means that are proper to effect the important work of his reconciliation with God. The first of these means is prayer. I mean humble, devout, and fervent prayer, accompanied with fasting and alms-deeds. If, then, my brethren, any one amongst you has the misfortune to be enslaved by a vicious habit, ask earnestly of God to be delivered from so dreadful a bondage ; ask in the name of Jesus, who has solemnly promised that whatsoever you ask the Father in His name shall be granted to you. Speak to him in the moving language in which Martha and Magdalen did when they petitioned for the health of their brother Lazarus : *Lord, behold he whom thou lovest is sick.* Lord, he whom thou hast created and formed to thy own image ; Lord, he whom thou hast redeemed with thy precious blood, and could I presume to say it, he whom thou still lovest is sick. Wilt thou suffer him to die and perish for all eternity ? Wilt thou suffer that soul to be lost, which thou hast so dearly purchased ? Make this prayer in the morning ; make it in the evening ; make it at the foot of the altar ; make it in your own house. If the sisters of Lazarus had not prayed, Lazarus would not have been restored to life. The more you are immersed in criminal habits, the more you are to redouble the fervor of your prayer ; the louder you are to cry to Heaven for mercy and pardon, in imitation of the Royal Prophet, who (Ps. cxxix.) cried out from the deep abyss, *De profundis, &c. From the depths have I cried to thee, O Lord ; O Lord, hear my voice.* The second means to overcome a habit of vice is retirement, solitude, and meditation. Disengage yourselves for

a few days from the embarrassments of worldly concerns, which hinder you to think of your salvation ; withdraw for a while from the noise of the world ; retire from the hurry of business, and reflect seriously on the misery and danger of your present unhappy state ; reflect on the multitude and enormity of your crying sins ; reflect on the patience of God, who has borne with you so long, and on His bounty, which makes Him ready to receive you with open arms, provided you return to Him in the sincerity of your hearts. If you allow yourselves a little time of cool reflection on these great truths, you will be convinced that heaven should be purchased, let what will be the price, and sin should be dreaded more than death itself. These reflections, deeply imprinted in your minds, will rouse you from the profound lethargy of sin, will make you triumph over vice, and have recourse to the holy sacraments of reconciliation with a sincere repentance, which is the only balsam that can rescue you from the jaws of hell, and fit you for heaven, by being duly applied to the deep and mortal wounds which sin has inflicted on your souls.

The third and last means to overcome a habit of vice is to shun the occasions of sin, according to that rule prescribed in the Gospel (St. Matt. xviii. 8) : *If thy hand, or thy foot, scandalize thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee ; and if thy eye scandalize thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee ;* that is, you must renounce what is most dear to you in the world, sooner than remain in the occasion of offending God and losing your soul. In vain do you flatter yourselves that you will subdue your inordinate passions, and triumph over your vicious habits, without taking these necessary precautions. In vain do you expect that your heart will be truly changed, while you live in the midst of those dangers and those engagements which have a thousand times baffled your very best resolutions. In vain do you think that you will be chaste and sober, whilst you frequent those places where intemperance is indulged, and whilst you will not be prevailed on to shun those familiarities, those private visits, those pestilential houses, those amorous novels and lascivious companions, that have so often debauched and corrupted your morals. Notwithstanding we frequently meet sinners, who, tired of their criminal disorders, and wearied in the ways of iniquity, would be willing to reform their lives and return to God, but still are not determined to withdraw from those objects and those snares which have so often proved fatal to their innocence. They, indeed, make some advances, some feeble efforts toward a conversion ; they address them-

selves to a spiritual director, and do not hesitate to make many fair promises and good resolutions ; they are engaged to consent to a salutary delay of the sacramental absolution, that they may in the interim give some satisfactory proof of the sincerity of their repentance, and take some measures that seem expedient to effect a true change of life. The time and the day on which they are to return to the sacred tribunal is marked out. This time, this day being come, instead of returning to give an account of their perseverance, they are seen no more. Some unlucky adventure comes across them, and throws them again into the occasion of sin, or perhaps they seek it of their own accord. This is sufficient to deter them from approaching the fountains of grace ; they complain without reason of the just severity with which they are treated in being refused the absolution until they are qualified to receive it with advantage to their souls. They pass their days in vainly detesting their chains, without being delivered from their bondage—penitents in appearance, but always sinners in reality, because they are unwilling to retrench the dangerous occasions of sin. In effect, my brethren, your evil habits are not to be conquered, your passions are not to be weakened, but by separating from those objects that first inflamed them. Begin, then, the work of your salvation by separating from those occasions. Remove the obstacles which hinder the grace of God from entering into your souls. The enterprise, I own, seems disagreeable and painful to flesh and blood, but it is an enterprise you must compass, or eternal damnation will be the consequence of your insolence and neglect. Resolve, then, my brethren, from this present time to surmount every difficulty that stands in your way and opposes your conversion. Let your case be ever so desperate, you are not to despond ; you have still a remedy left. There is no sin unpardonable, no wound incurable, to the hand of an all-powerful physician, says St. Augustine. There is no habit, be it ever so inveterate, ever so obstinate, stubborn, or perverse, but you may absolutely depose and overcome with the help of God, if you labor in good earnest and faithfully co-operate with His divine grace, which is able to change the most corrupt heart in an instant. Jesus Christ, who raised Lazarus from the dead, is both willing and able to work a similar miracle in your favor, provided you have recourse to Him in the sincerity of your hearts. If there be any Lazarus in this congregation, if there be any old habitual sinners here, involved in the dismal state and servitude of mortal sin ; O let me eutreat them to sleep no longer in the arms of perdition, but to arise from their

lethargy without delay, and throw themselves at the feet of God's mercy with a contrite and humbled heart, which He never will reject. O good and merciful Lord, look down upon us with an eye of pity, and as Thou didst heretofore deliver the children of Israel from the bondage of Egypt, so vouchsafe to deliver us all from the bondage of sin. Break the chains of iniquity with which we are bound, and restore us to the sweet liberty of Thy children, that we may sacrifice to Thee a host of thanksgiving, and proclaim Thy immortal praises for all eternity in the society of Thy angels and saints in the kingdom of Heaven. Which I heartily wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

ON SHUNNING THE DANGEROUS OCCASIONS OF SIN

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. The life of Christ, the model of a Christian's life.
- II. Those that seek the occasion of sin shall perish in it.
- III. Sinners that seek the occasion of sin shall not rise to grace.
- IV. Necessity of avoiding the occasions of sin.

Qui amat periculum peribit in illo.—Eccles. c. iii. v. 27.

He that loveth danger shall perish in it.—Eccles. c. iii. v. 27.

THE life of a Christian ought to be the proof of his religion, and a public declaration of the sanctity of his profession; for what is a Christian but a disciple of Jesus Christ, enlightened with the light of his faith, educated in the great truths of his religion, formed upon the bright principles of His Gospel, and openly professing to follow Jesus Christ Himself as his leader and pattern! To follow Christ is to frame our lives by the model of His life, to resemble Him as far as human frailty will permit, to observe the precepts and rules of the Gospel, to declare war against the pomps and vanities of the world, to abhor and detest sin, to renounce all alliance with the devil, and all truce with our inordinate passions and vicious inclinations. These are the duties to which we obliged ourselves at the baptismal font; this is what we vowed when we entered into the Church of Christ, and upon this condition only we were received into the number of the faithful. You will

say, perhaps, this punctuality, this exact observance of the maxims of the Gospel, is scarce compatible with the different states and professions of men, who live in a world where they are constantly exposed to so many dangers and temptations. If anchorets in the desert, and recluses in their beloved retreats, find a difficulty in preserving themselves from the contagion of vice, how can we in the midst of worldly engagements, with a frail nature and a strong propensity to evil, be firm and constant in the practice of virtue? I agree with you, my brethren, it is no easy matter; nature is frail, and the danger is every where present. However, exposed to danger, and frail as you are, you have still a specific remedy and an efficacious means to save yourselves from the danger; this remedy is to shun the occasions of sin. If you are just, be always on your guard, lest you diminish your strength by seeking the occasion and loving the danger; if you are sinners, be likewise on your guard, lest you augment your weakness by engaging yourselves in the occasion, and throwing yourselves in the way of temptation. If you are in the state of grace, and seek the dangerous occasion of sin, it will make you fall. This I will show you in my first point. If you are in the state of sin, the occasion will hinder you from rising out of it. This shall be the second point, and the whole subject of your favorable attention. Let us previously invoke the divine aid, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, saluting her with the angel, and saying, *Ave Maria*.

We are to distinguish two different sorts of dangerous occasions that lead and incite a person to sin. Some occasions are evidently dangerous of their own nature, and with regard to all men in general, such as bad company, associating with professed libertines, forming connections with people of depraved morals and bad principles, frequenting seminaries of vice and houses of ill-fame, reading bad books, viewing immodest pictures, hearkening to obscene songs and lewd discourses; the natural tendency and immediate effect of such dangerous occasions being to inflame the passions, and to draw people into mortal sin. There is another kind of occasion, which of its own intrinsic nature is not bad or apt to lead men in general into sin, but is respectively dangerous, that is to say, in regard of and with respect to a particular individual, on account of his peculiar disposition and frailty; for example, a certain house, a certain company, a certain occupation and employment, which accidentally becomes the immediate and dangerous occasion of mortal sin to a man, who knows by experience that he is so

weak as to be thereby often led astray, and to make a shipwreck of his virtue, though other men in general resort to the same place, frequent the same company, and follow the same occupation, without being exposed to the like danger. There are, in fine, other occasions, which are only remote and distant occasions of sin, or which, though they may possibly occasion a person to fall, yet seldom or rarely do it. Were we under an obligation of shunning all occasions of this description, we should be under the necessity of quitting the world entirely, as the Apostle remarks, since there is scarcely anything but what may happen one time or other, to prove the remote and distant occasion of sin.

As to the immediate occasions, which of their own nature have a dangerous tendency in general, or which, by reason of a person's own peculiar weakness are respectively dangerous, and apt to draw him frequently into sin, they must be indispensably shunned and relinquished. No temporal profit or loss can render it lawful to continue willfully in such occasions, when a person has it in his power to avoid and quit them; for the same divine precept that forbids sin, forbids us also to remain in the immediate danger of sinning, and obliges us to separate ourselves effectually from whatever is morally inseparable from sin, though it should happen to be as dear to us as the very apple of our eye. This is manifest from the doctrine of our Blessed Saviour (St. Matthew, xviii. 8), where He charges us to cut off the hand and the foot, and to pluck out the eye that scandalizes us; that is to say, to break off from all the dangerous occasions of sin, how dear soever they may be to us; to remove those favorite objects which are fatal to virtue and innocence; to abandon those darling companions who lead us into criminal practices; to renounce those dangerous freedoms and liberties which pave the way to the spiritual ruin of so many souls; to forsake those places where the enticing nets of sensual pleasures are spread on every side for the destruction of giddy and thoughtless youth, and to shun those houses where the passions are roused, where drunkenness prevails, and where debauchery is counted an accomplishment. These are so many hands and feet that must be cut off; these are so many eyes, as it were, that must be plucked out and cast away, when they are a constant source of scandal to us, that is, when they frequently prove the occasion of sin to us; for, in the Scripture language, every thing is scandal that violently inclines and leads us into sin. Fatal experience teaches us how great our own weakness is, and that he who loves and seeks the danger may justly expect to perish therein. In

spite of our strongest resolutions and purposes, if we expose ourselves to the occasion, the occasion will overthrow us and make us fall, since the occasion always presents the same alluring objects, and the same objects seldom fail of making the same impressions on the heart, and the same impressions usually bring on the same fatal consequences, as man carries about him the same fund of natural weakness and misery. He is a combustible matter, says St. Chrysostom, and should therefore fear to throw himself into the midst of burning coals. Even the most just man, and the most attached to the service of God, who of his own accord runs with temerity into the occasion, cannot promise himself that he will escape the danger without falling into sin, and that for two reasons; first, because nothing provokes God more to withdraw his graces from him; secondly, because nothing gives the enemy of his soul a greater power over him. In the first place, I say, nothing provokes God more to withdraw his graces; I mean those powerful, those efficacious, those victorious graces with which we easily overcome all the efforts of hell, and without which we can never resist the temptation; graces, which are oftener bestowed on the just, who know how to have a due esteem for them, than on sinners, who despise, undervalue, and regard them not; but graces, which both the just and sinners render themselves unworthy of when they boldly look temptation in the face, and rashly throw themselves into the dangerous occasion of sin; for the Almighty, who is sovereignly righteous and infinitely wise, does not dispense these supernatural favors according to our humor or caprice, but according to that order which His infinite wisdom has established, as St. Cyprian speaks. There is no danger, no temptation, indeed, but we may conquer with His divine assistance. His grace preserved Abraham amidst the errors of idolatry, Lot in the centre of Sodom, and Daniel at the court of Nabuchodonosor. It preserved the principles of Job amidst the contagion of infidelity; the chastity of Joseph from the solicitations of his master's wife, and the virtue of Susanna against the assaults of two old lechers, who were intent on her destruction. But these were occasions to which they had not exposed themselves of their own accord; they were placed in those critical situations by the ordinance of Divine Providence, and by the hand of God Himself, who therefore supported them with His grace, and preserved them from falling on these occasions. If it is God who calls and sends you under similar circumstances; if it be the order of Heaven and the will of Providence that you should enter the lists with the

enemies of your salvation, and that your fidelity should be put to the proof by severe trials and combats, you may walk on with an humble confidence, that God will be your protector and safeguard in the midst of the greatest dangers. His grace will support you in the day of battle, and insure you the victory ; it will make you rise superior to all hostile attacks, and to all the evil solicitations that may assail you, provided you arm yourselves with the spiritual weapons of fervent prayer and Christian vigilance. It will enable you to conquer those dreadful sallies of passion that you are frequently exposed to by the profligacy of a wicked, turbulent, drunken husband ; by the peevish temper of a cross, ill-humored, scolding wife, or by the like dangerous occasions which are unavoidable, and which, consistent with your indispensable duty, you have it not in your power to quit. On the contrary, if, of your own accord, you voluntarily and deliberately expose yourselves to the evident danger of sin, and run into the occasion, from which you may easily be disengaged, you have no reason to hope that God will work a miracle in order to authorize your presumption. How can you expect, amidst the occasions of sin into which you rashly venture, to command, whenever you please, that grace which the Antonies, the Hilarions, the Pauls, and so many other devout recluses were not sure to find in the most retired solitude, and in the practice of the most austere penance ? Is not your presumption a just reason for God to forsake and leave you to your own weakness, and permit you to fall into surprising frailties, which will cover you with confusion before Him and before the world.

The Lord sometimes suffers the brightest stars to be eclipsed, and lets the just be perverted and become criminal, when relying on their own strength and self-sufficiency they fear not to seek the dangerous occasions of sin ; whilst, on the other hand, He succors and assists those who, diffident of themselves, place all their trust and strength in His all-powerful arm. Two memorable examples will elucidate this truth ; one is of St. Peter, the other of St. Paul. They were both in the city of Jerusalem, both in the same occasion, and both seemingly of the same disposition. They were to appear in the presence of a judge, to support the interest of their Divine Master, and either publicly to renounce Jesus Christ, or to declare for Him aloud. Peter said to the Saviour of the World on the eve of His passion, that though it should cost him his life he never would deny Him. The language of St. Paul was the same ; though, said he, I should be bound, imprisoned, and condemned to death,

I am ready to endure all, rather than forsake Jesus Christ—Acts, xxi. Here are words and sentiments seemingly the same, on one side and the other ; but, alas ! the event is quite different. Peter falls, and shamefully denies his Lord and Master. Paul is unshaken in his resolution, and publicly espouses the cause of his Redeemer. Whence comes this difference ? It is because Peter, too confident of himself, and contrary to the advice of the Son of God, sought the occasion, went of his own accord in the way of temptation, entered the house of Caiphas, mixed with bad company, and conversed with the enemies of Jesus Christ. But this was not the case of St. Paul. If he appears in the palace of the governor, it was the Holy Ghost who conducted him there—Acts, xx. Had he exposed himself to the occasion of his own accord, the grace of God might have been justly withdrawn from him, and he might have been permitted to fall like Peter, who, for want of perfect docility to the orders of Heaven, and a continual watchfulness over himself, was suffered to fall at the voice of a servant maid, in a place to which he was not called by the Almighty, though afterward, when he was cited before the tribunals of tyrants by the divine command, he was immovable and indefatigable in bearing testimony to the sacred name of Jesus.

We read also in the Old Testament, that when Sampson, of his own accord, ventured to face the greatest danger, from the over-great confidence he had in his own strength, the Lord departed from him at that very time, and left him to his own weakness, to fall a victim to his temerity—Judg. xvi. 20. What happened to David, that prince according to God's own heart ? Walking one day in the hall of his palace, he perceived Bethsabee, the wife of Urias, at a distance ; but though she was afar off, alas ! his passion was but too near him, as St. Augustine speaks : *Mulier longé, libido propè*. His ruin was at hand, though he was a prophet, because he did not take the necessary precaution to retire from the place, and turn off his eyes from the dangerous object and immediate occasion of sin. One too curious a glance of his eye made him become at once a murderer and an adulterer. Hence St. John Chrysostom cries out and says, O, how do I fear for the man who does not fear for himself ! He is then the most weak when he thinks himself the strongest ; he is then most liable to fall, when he flatters himself that he is proof against all danger, as it is then that God is most provoked to punish his presumption, by withdrawing His all-powerful hand, and not granting him those special graces which he renders him-

self unworthy of, by willfully meeting and remaining in the occasion of sin ; nay, it is then that the enemy of mankind acquires a greater power over him, and is furnished with arms to oppose him with more force, and to accomplish his entire ruin.

In effect, my brethren, what are the most powerful weapons Satan makes use of to destroy your souls ? Your passions. And what is it that influences and inflames your passions ? Those sensible objects which present themselves to you, with all the attractives that are most seducing and engaging. And what draws you within the reach of those dangerous objects ? The occasions, that is, those assemblies where the world displays its vanities with pomp and ostentation ; those places, those nocturnal meetings, where intemperance is indulged, and the flesh is pampered ; those comedies, amorous novels, and other pernicious books, which are read with attention, and which spread irreligion and corruption throughout the soul ; those private visits and interviews ; those unbecoming liberties and dangerous familiarities ; those licentious discourses, *double entendres*, and immodest songs that fill the mind with filthy ideas, and make deep and mortal wounds in the heart. These are the occasions where concupiscence is roused, where the passions are inflamed, where fuel is added to fire, and, in a word, where sin and hell make their dreadful ravages, to the eternal ruin of thousands of souls. If you run into these dangers, and entangle yourselves in these snares, how can you flatter yourselves with the hopes of victory ? Will you not diminish your strength, augment your weakness, second your inclinations to evil, and become an easier prey to the malice of the devil ? He requires but a small beginning on our side, but one only overture on our part, to gain an ascendant over us. What then must it be, if we open to him all the doors of our heart, all the avenues and windows of our soul ? We are all vessels of clay ; a light shock, a small stroke, is sufficient to shatter us to pieces. What must it be if we let loose the reins to all our senses, expose our souls to every temptation, and give ourselves the liberty to see all, to hear all, to be one in every party of pleasure, to be in the midst of danger, to be present in all those companies and places where modesty is ridiculed, where religion is laughed at, where piety is run down, where innocence is put to the blush, where vice triumphs, and the world is decked out in all its most tempting allurements ? You know how contagious the air of the world is, and therefore you should not expose yourselves to the danger of catching the infection. You should fly its insidious pleasures, profane joys, vain

intrigues, luxuries, and follies, which are so apt to effeminate the soul and nourish the depravity of the human heart. If the strongest pillars have been shaken, should not weak and frail reeds tremble for themselves? Should we not all beware of running into the dangerous occasions of sin, since, *he who loves the danger shall perish in it*. If he be in the state of grace, the occasion will make him fall, as I have already shown you; and if he be in the state of sin, the occasion will hinder him from rising out of it, as I will now briefly show you in a few words.

As God withdraws his special graces from the just, when, of their own accord, they engage themselves in the occasion of sin, it is not to be supposed he will grant these graces to sinners whilst they are unwilling to quit the occasion. It is then a consequence naturally inferred from what I have hitherto advanced, that the sinner will never rise from the state of sin whilst he is unwilling to separate from the dangerous occasion of it, and that he will not be able to obtain a complete victory in those circumstances, in which the just are overcome, and meet with difficulties almost insurmountable, especially as the sinner has more obstacles to surmount in the occasion, in order to rise from the actual state of sin, than the just man has to keep himself in the state of grace and innocence; for when the sinner's heart is once engaged, and vicious habits have taken deep root in it; when a criminal passion has, by a long prescription, gained a tyrannical ascendant over it, and plunged the unhappy sinner into an abyss of iniquity, and into the thickest shades of infernal darkness, nothing less than a miracle in the order of grace is requisite to break the chains with which he is fettered, and emancipate him from the galling yoke under which he groans. Whilst he remains in the occasion, he will constantly fall into crimes still more and more heinous, and his case will grow continually worse and worse; for, as whilst the cause of a corporal infirmity is not removed from the body, the disorder still increases every day, and the strength of the patient is gradually diminished, till nature becomes quite exhausted. Thus the sinner falls from one sin into another, and sin being an abyss without bottom, into which he daily descends, the more he descends the more difficult it is for him to rise out of it. It was thus the occasion destroyed Solomon, the wisest and most enlightened of men, but a sad monument of the weakness of man, and of the dreadful consequence of remaining in the occasion of sin. Had he separated himself from the unhappy women who seduced him, he would not have fallen into the frightful

precipice of so many crimes, nor have been led into excesses so shameful and so unbecoming his rank and character ; at least, he would have returned soon to his God. But because he did not turn them off, as he should have done, but persisted obstinately in conversing with them, after forgetting himself, he forgot the God of his forefathers, passed from adultery into idolatry, and blindly adored as many idols as were presented to him—3 Kings, xi.

In vain, therefore, my brethren, do you flatter yourselves with the hopes of recovering the grace of God, whilst you are unwilling to remove that object which is the cause of your criminal disorders, or to shun the company or quit the house where you are exposed to the evident danger of eternal damnation. Make as many fair promises as you please at the sacred tribunal of penance, form as many fine projects of conversion as you will ; they are not to be relied on whilst you continue willfully in the dangerous occasions of sin, and, like those insects that play about the flames that scorch them, adhere to those objects that have so frequently proved your ruin. By refusing to renounce and shun the cause of your relapses, you plainly show that you retain interiorly in your heart a secret affection for sin, and you cannot be deemed a true and sincere penitent, or capable of being admitted to a participation of the holy sacraments ; for the criterion by which a true and sincere conversion may be distinguished from a false one is to fly from sin, and from the occasions of it, as from the face of a venomous serpent, according to the important advice of the Holy Ghost—Eccles. xxi.

Let me, therefore, entreat you to keep at the greatest distance from the rock on which you have so often split. Let me beseech you to walk no longer on the brink of a precipice where you are continually exposed to the danger of perishing. Break off without further delay those criminal engagements by which you are enslaved, and separate yourselves from all the dangerous occasions of sin, which, according to St. Peter Chrysologus, are so many smoking firebrands that are apt to be rekindled by the slightest breath. Assist us, O Lord, that we may escape the dangers which environ us on every side in the tempestuous ocean of this world, where so many rocks are hid, so many storms arise, and the current naturally carries us on, unless we are guided and supported by Thy all-powerful grace. The saints themselves have trembled at the very thoughts hereof. Penetrate us, we beseech Thee, with the same salutary fear, that it may excite our vigilance, and make us live with more circumspection, till we arrive, with the aid of Thy Divine

grace, at the fortunate term of a happy eternity. Which I sincerely wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

ON PRAYER

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. The efficacy of Prayer illustrated by examples.
- II. The nature and necessity of Prayer.
- III. The accompanying qualities and conditions of Prayer.
- IV. Conclusion, with a prayer to Jesus.

Si quid petieritis Patrem in nomine meo, dabit vobis.—St. Jo. c. xvi. v. 23.

If you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it you.—St. John, c. xvi. v. 23.

THERE is nothing more necessary or advantageous to man than prayer. By it we discover our wants, and display our miseries before the throne of the Most High, and by a holy violence, as it were, compel the divine mercy to be propitious to our cries. It is the ordinary channel through which all blessings flow from above ; it is the shield and armor of a Christian, and the strongest fence against the devil ; it is, as St. Augustine calls it, the key of heaven, that unlocks the treasures of God, and gives men free access to the riches of His divine bounty. It was by prayer that Elias opened and shut the sluices of heaven when he pleased, and caused fire to descend from above to consume his sacrifice. It was by prayer that Josue made the sun stand in the midst of its course. The prayer of Moses contributed more to the signal victory which Josue gained over the army of the Amalekites than all the weapons of Israel ; for, as long as his hands were raised up to Heaven, his prayers drew down a blessing on the army of Israel ; and he no sooner ceased from prayer, and let down his hands (being unable to keep them in that painful posture as many hours as the battle lasted), but the Amalekites began to prevail. It was by prayer that the Prophet Daniel was preserved unhurt in the lion's den, and the three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace of Babylon. It was by prayer that the chains of St. Peter, when in prison, were broken asunder, and that St.

Paul was protected and helped amidst the many dangers and difficulties which he had to encounter—2 Cor. i. 11 ; Rom. xv. 30.

There is no favor but may be obtained by the means of prayer. *Ask, and it shall be given you*, says our Lord in the Gospel ; *seek, and you shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened to you*—Matt. vii. 7. Such is the bounty and liberality of our God, and so wonderful is His condescension, goodness, and compassion for us, that he allows us free access to the throne of his mercy and grace at any hour of the day or of the night, with a positive assurance of meeting always with a favorable audience whenever we please. He offers us an infallible remedy to redress all our grievances, and promises to give us everything we want, provided we only ask for it. May not our perdition, then, be justly laid at our own door, if we neglect having recourse to Him in all our necessities, both spiritual and temporal ? Can we show a greater contempt of His blessings, or undervalue His gracious favors more, than by neglecting to ask for them, or by asking for them with indifference, as if they were not worth asking for ? It is true, indeed, He does not stand in need of us, or of our prayers. He knows our wants before we open our mouths to implore His assistance, and He is inclined to help us, but He is willing that we should be sensible of our own indigence and misery, and that we should fly to Him for relief. Nay, He presses and solicits us to approach with confidence, and, for our greater encouragement, our Divine Redeemer has solemnly engaged His word in the Gospel of this day that His Heavenly Father will grant us *all things whatsoever we shall ask in his name*. We must, therefore, either question the veracity of His words, or conclude that our prayers will certainly be crowned with success, if there be no fault or defect on our side that justly deserves a refusal. To guard you against those defects, and to instruct you properly in the nature of a duty so closely connected with your salvation, is the design of the following discourse. In the first point, I intend to lay before you the nature and necessity of prayer ; and in the second point, to show you the qualities and conditions with which our prayers must be accompanied, in order to render them effectual and acceptable in the sight of God. Let us implore the light of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of the Blessed Mother of Jesus, greeting her with the words of the angel, *Ave Maria*.

Our manifold necessities, both spiritual and corporal, the depravity and infirmities of our nature, the various dangers to which we are constantly exposed, our inability to do the least good of ourselves, the fre-

quent temptations of the devil, the world, and the flesh, which we have to combat and overcome, are convincing proofs of the indispensable obligation and absolute necessity of prayer. *Watch ye and pray*, says our Lord, *that ye enter not into temptation*—Matt. xxvi. 41. St. Paul (1 Thess. v. 17) will have us *to pray without ceasing*, and to seek the face of the Lord evermore, as we are always in need of His help. Not that the Apostle means that we should be incessantly on our knees, or evermore actually thinking of God, as this would be incompatible with our weakness and the different obligations of our respective states; but that we are to walk evermore in the presence of God, to raise our hearts frequently to Him from time to time, to have a constant intention and desire of pleasing Him, and to offer up all our actions to His honor and glory. St. John Chrysostom says that they are unworthy of the name of Christians who neglect morning and evening prayer, whereby the windows of the soul are opened to the light of grace, and shut against the darkness of sin and the illusions of the devil. Morning and evening prayer is a tribute we owe to our great Creator, as our first beginning and last end. It is an homage due to His Sovereign Majesty, in testimony of His supreme dominion over us, and our total dependence on Him in all things; it is an humble attestation of our own indigence and insufficiency, and a grateful acknowledgment of God's infinite goodness, and of our entire confidence in Him; it is a submission in which the Almighty will have us live, that thereby having a continual recourse to Him in all our necessities, we may be inviolably devoted to His service all the days of our life. Hereby we pay Him a religious worship as our Lord, we adore Him as our Creator, we honor Him as our Father; hereby we praise and thank Him as our benefactor, we invoke Him as our protector, our preserver, our comfort, our refuge, and our help in all our wants; hereby we own Him to be the Author of all good, the Source of all holiness, and the Giver of all gifts. These are duties that religion prescribes and commands. They are frequently inculcated in the Scripture, and have been always regularly practiced by all the saints and servants of God, both in the Old and New Testament, who thought it incumbent on them to offer up their prayers to the Lord, not only every morning and evening, but several other times in the day. To pass over numberless instances hereof, it is recorded of the Prophet Daniel, that he chose rather to be thrown into a den of lions than to neglect this important duty three stated times every day—Dan. vi. King David also rose at midnight to pray, though he performed the

same duty seven times a day at stated hours, as he informs us in Ps. cxviii., where he says : *Seven times a day I have given praise to thee, O Lord.* What is more, he says in Ps. xxxiii. : *I will bless the Lord at all times ; his praise shall be always in my mouth.* We read in the Acts, vi. 4, that the Apostles *gave themselves up continually to prayer.* When they were preparing themselves for the coming of the Holy Ghost, *they all continued unanimously in prayer*—i. 14. When they were about choosing St. Matthias to fill up the place of Judas, and the seven deacons to manage the temporalities of the Church ; and when they were about sending Saul and Barnabas on their mission to preach the Gospel, they had recourse to *prayer and fasting*—i. 6, 12. Nay, Christ Himself, though he had no need of praying on His own account, or for Himself, frequently passed whole hours, and sometimes whole nights in prayer, to convince us by His own example of the necessity of prayer, and to excite us to the frequent exercise of this religious duty. Hence the primitive Christians were so addicted to prayer, *that their hearts and conversation might be truly said to be in Heaven, where their treasure was.* Besides beginning and ending every day with God, by morning and evening prayer, they were accustomed to raise their thoughts to Him often in the course of the day, whilst their hands were employed at work, and undertook nothing without first offering it to His greater honor and glory. They looked upon themselves here on earth as in a place of exile, and in a foreign country far from their native home, like unto the children of Israel in the captivity of Babylon ; and therefore they constantly longed for the end of their mortal pilgrimage, and daily aspired toward heavenly Jerusalem, by fervent and devout prayer.

All this plainly shows that prayer is one of the most necessary duties of a Christian. It is the ordinary means appointed by God, and required as a condition on our part, for obtaining the helps and graces that are necessary to salvation. It differs from the other means of salvation herein, that the want of it cannot be supplied by anything else. The want of actual baptism may be supplied by martyrdom, as was the case of the holy innocents. The want of the sacrament of penance may be supplied by perfect contrition. Those who are unable to fast, or practice the rigorous austerities of self-denial and mortification, may supply the want of them by alms-deeds ; and the poor have it in their power to supply their want of alms-deeds by bearing their crosses and afflictions with patience and resignation to the Divine will. But the want

of prayer can be supplied by nothing else ; so that if it be neglected, the graces annexed and promised to it will not be bestowed, for this reason, because they are not asked, as St. James observes : *You have not, because you ask not.* The grace of prayer itself is never wanting to us ; it is a gift of God ; for, as St. Paul says : *Of ourselves we are not sufficient to think even a good thought ; we know not even what we should pray for ; nor can we say Lord Jesus, but by the Holy Spirit.* But God, out of His infinite mercy, bestows the grace of prayer upon all men as the first step toward their salvation, moving them to have recourse to Him, and giving them the ability to pray. He commands them to pray, which presupposes that they have grace to do so, since, as the Council of Trent observes (Sess. 6, c. 11) : “ God does not command impossibilities ; but by commanding us, He admonishes us to do what we can, to pray for whatever help we stand in need of, and then He helps and enables us to do the good He commands.” So that if we be so devoid of religion, and so careless about our salvation as to neglect prayer, the principal means to secure it, we may justly blame ourselves for all the fatal consequences of so culpable a neglect.

Prayer is founded upon faith and hope, and implies the most perfect acts of religion. The idea of it is not to be confined to petition only, as those people seem to imagine who appear only in the divine presence with hands lifted up to receive the favors of Heaven. They call upon God to represent to Him their wants, and have a heart but to wish, and a tongue but to ask ; they are fervent and eloquent in petitioning, but cool, languid, and deficient in blessing, praising, and thanking the Lord for the benefits received. It is therefore to be remarked, that by prayer is understood an elevation of the mind and of the heart to Heaven, or a conversation, address, and discourse of the soul with God ; and as this may be done five different ways, there are for this reason five different kinds of prayer : meditation, oblation, thanksgiving, petition, and adoration. These again may be performed either internally or externally, either in private or in public ; for which reason prayer is also distinguished by the appellations of mental and vocal, public and private prayer. Mental or internal prayer, otherwise called meditation, is performed in the heart, without being expressed in words. Vocal prayer is performed with the tongue, or by word of mouth. A daily meditation, at least for half an hour, is strongly recommended as one of the most effectual means to improve in the love of God, and to advance in virtue. It is to the neglect of it that the Scripture attributes all the

disorders of mankind. *With desolation is all the land made desolate*, says the Prophet Jeremias, xii. 11, *because there is none that considereth in the heart*. Public or common prayer is that which the faithful, united together in a body, offer up in the public worship of the Church, or which a whole family, or a number of devout Christians assembled at home, or in an oratory, offers up together. Our Blessed Saviour teaches us in the *Lord's Prayer* to pray as if many were assembled together; and He assures us (Matt. xviii.) *that where two or three are assembled thus in His name, He is in the midst of them*. Hence St. John Chrysostom says (Homil. 3): *You do not pray so well, nor do you obtain so much, when you pray alone to the Lord, as when you pray unanimously with your brethren*. But what are the qualities and conditions of prayer? This is what I promised to lay before you in the second point.

If we are willing that God should hear us in our prayers, says St. Gregory, we must hear Him in His commandments, since *it is not every one that says, Lord, Lord, that shall be saved, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven*, as our Blessed Saviour speaks in the Gospel. To partake of all the advantages annexed to prayer, it should be performed in the state of grace; for it is *the prayer of the just man availeth much*, as St. James tells us, (v. 16,) and as the Royal Prophet says (Ps. xxxiii. 16): *The eyes of the Lord are upon the just, and His ears are open to their prayers; but His countenance is against them that do evil things*, and willfully persist in mortal sin. *When they stretch forth their hands, He turns away His eyes from them*, as the Prophet Isaïas speaks (i. 15), *and when they multiply their prayers, He will not hear*. However, if a Christian be so unhappy as to be involved in the guilt of mortal sin, he is not therefore to neglect prayer, since the more criminal he is the more he stands in need of it, and the more diligent he should be in praying for the grace of a true conversion, and imploring the mercy of God. Prayer, accompanied with a sincere purpose of amendment, is his only resource; and the examples of the humble publican and the prodigal son should be an encouragement to him, as they show how ready the Lord is to hear the prayers of the greatest sinners, when they return to Him in the sincerity of their hearts, and cry to Him for mercy and pardon. The publican was justified by this short prayer, *God be merciful to me a sinner*; the penitent thief on the cross found mercy by crying out, *Lord, remember me when Thou comest to Thy kingdom*; which is a proof that God requires the desires of the heart more than a multitude of words; nay, it is an abuse reproved by Jesus

Christ, to multiply many vain idle words in prayer, without the spirit of devotion. *When you pray* (says He, Matt. vi. 7), *speaking not much, as the heathens do, for they think that in their much speaking they may be heard.* It were better to say a few prayers from the heart than to turn over so many leaves in our books of devotion through mere custom, and run through a confused jumble and rotation of vocal prayers in an irreverent and disorderly manner; for when the mind is not raised to God, and the heart does not perform its part as well as the tongue, we can no more be said to pray than a person who would repeat with his mouth the same number of vocal prayers in his sleep, or out of his senses. In a word, attention is the spirit and soul of prayer, and if it be wanting, prayer is defective in its very substance, it being essentially a raising up of the mind and heart to God, or, in other terms, the desires of the heart and soul expressed in words. Let the lips and tongue, therefore, be ever so busily employed, unless our hearts and thoughts be fixed on God, it is only praying in outward appearance, and not in effect. It is only praying like the Pharisees, of whom Christ complains in the Gospel, and says: *This people honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me*--Matt. xv. 8. How can such persons expect that God will give attention to their petitions, when they pay no attention themselves to what they pray for? Is it not dishonoring God to address His Divine Majesty with such disrespect, such coolness, such indifference, and to pretend to manifest to Him the desires of the heart, when the heart is in no way concerned, nor has any sincere or earnest desire of obtaining what the words express, but is wandering upon worldly objects, and occupied with willful distractions? It is necessary to discharge all foreign thoughts, and to keep a close guard upon our mind and upon our heart when we go to prayer. We should prepare our souls for appearing in the Divine presence with due respect, according to the admonition of the Holy Ghost (Eccles. xviii. 23): *Before prayer prepare thy soul, and be not as a man that tempteth God.* This preparation consists in calling to mind the presence of God, in keeping a lively sense of it during the time of prayer, and in directing our intention to a good end.

Our Blessed Saviour instructs us (Matt. vi. 5) about the purity of intention which we ought to have in praying: *When ye pray*, says He, *you shall not be as the hypocrites, that love to stand and pray in the synagogues and corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men; but go into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to thy Father*

in secret ; and thy Father, who seeth in secret, will repay thee. This shows that true devotion seeks only to please God in the closet of the heart ; and whilst it edifies by all marks of a solid piety in places of public worship, it avoids all ostentation, vanity, singularity, and pharisaical affectation. Humility is another condition of good prayer. The Scripture tells us, that *the prayer of him that humbleth himself shall pierce the clouds*, (Eccles. xxxv. 21), and that *God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble*—St. James, iv. 6. *He hath regard to the prayer of the humble*, says the Royal Prophet, and *He hath not despiseth their petition* ; and again (Ps. xxxiii. 19), *He is nigh unto them that are of a contrite heart, and He will save the humble of spirit*. The efficacy of humble prayer appears evidently in the poor publican, in the prodigal son, in the centurion, mentioned in Matt. viii., and in the Cananean woman, who being told by our Blessed Saviour, that *the bread of children was not to be cast to the dogs*, was so far from being discouraged at this humiliating expression, that she persisted in her prayer, and modestly replied, that *whelps also eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table*. By this humiliation and debasement of herself, she moved the tender and compassionate heart of Jesus to grant her petition, and dispossess her daughter of an evil spirit—Matt. xv. 22. If we, therefore, wish to render our prayers acceptable to God, and available to ourselves, we must beware of following the example of the proud Pharisee, who confided in his own justice, depended on his own merits, and presumptuously imagined that he was worthy that his prayers should be heard. Far from entertaining such groundless ideas, or being carried away by such haughty and presumptuous notions, which bespeak a malediction rather than a blessing, we are to renounce all self-confidence, and to throw ourselves entirely on the mercy and goodness of God, and His fidelity to His promises. We are to prostrate ourselves like the publican, as criminals, in the most submissive posture, with a reverential awe, and with an inward humility of soul, at the feet of our offended Lord. We are to lay open to His eyes all the wounds of our souls, that they may be healed. We are to represent all our wants and necessities to Him, like poor indigent supplicants, earnestly craving a charitable alms, and fervently praying for relief with a sincere desire and wish to obtain it. We are to be penetrated with a deep sense of our own unworthiness, not only to obtain the mercy we implore, but even to lift up our eyes, or to appear and speak in the presence of so great a Majesty. Such were the sentiments

of the Patriarch Abraham, when he said : *Shall I presume to speak to the Lord, I who am nothing but dust and ashes ?* Such likewise would be our sentiments, were we but thoroughly convinced of our misery, indigence, and inability to do the least thing toward our salvation, of ourselves, and by our own natural strength. The next condition that must accompany our prayers is a lively unshaken faith, or a firm confidence and trust in God's boundless power, goodness, and mercy. This condition is so necessary, that St. Augustine says, *Si fides deficit oratio perit* : If faith be wanting, prayer is lost. Our Blessed Saviour required this disposition in the two blind men to whom He restored their sight (Matt. ix. 2), and in the sick man whom He miraculously cured of the palsy, and commanded to *take up his bed and walk*. A soul full of this holy confidence is like unto a sacred vessel into which the divine mercy pours the treasures of its grace, and the greater the confidence is, the greater also are the heavenly favors and blessings that prayer draws into such a soul. On the contrary, diffidence and despondency makes a person unworthy of God's favors ; it binds and shuts up his hands, and stops the course of his graces. Christ checked His disciples for this defect, saying, *O ye of little faith, why have ye doubted ?* It was for this reason that Peter began to sink when he was walking on the surface of the sea ; it was on the same account that neither he nor any of his companions were able to cast out the devil, spoken of in St. Mark, ix., which gave our Saviour occasion to say to them, *If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth ;* and again, in ch. xi. 22, 23 : *Have faith in God. Amen, I say to you, that whosoever shall say to this mountain, be thou removed, and be cast into the sea, and shall not stagger in his heart, but believe that whatsoever he sayeth shall be done, it shall be done unto him ; therefore I say unto you, all things whatsoever you ask when you pray, believe that you shall receive, and they shall come unto you.* This is sufficient to show how necessary it is to present your petitions to God with a certain and assured confidence of success, firmly believing that He is both able and willing to grant your requests, and hoping without hesitation or any diffidence, that He will actually grant them according to His promise. Hence St. James (i. 6) advises us *to ask in faith, nothing wavering ; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, which is moved and carried about by the wind ; let not that man think he shall receive anything of the Lord.* Another condition of prayer is, to present our petitions in the name of *Jesus Christ*, who has assured us,

that whatsoever we shall ask the Father in His name, shall be given to us. He is the Mediator of our redemption ; He is our Advocate and our High Priest ; and there is *no other name under Heaven given to men whereby we must be saved*—Acts, iv. 12. He has purchased for us the graces which we pray for, and it is *through Him that we are to go with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace in seasonable aid*—Heb. iv. 16. His infinite merits are the foundation on which we are to ground our hopes. To pray for things which we erroneously imagine would be a means to promote our happiness, but which God foresees would prove an obstacle to our salvation, and become the occasion of the eternal ruin and loss of our souls, if our desires were gratified the way we ask, is not praying in the name of Jesus, as St. Augustine remarks, Tract 102 in Jo., where he says : *Whatever is asked of the Father contrary to His honor, or prejudicial to our salvation, is not asked in the name of Jesus, though His sacred name may be interposed ;* consequently, we are not to imagine that God breaks His word, if He refuse to grant our requests in this case. It is a great mercy in Him to be then deaf to our cries, and to pay no regard to our mistaken petitions. *What man is there among you, says our Saviour (Matt. vii. 9), of whom if his son shall ask bread, will he reach him a stone ; or if he shall ask him a fish, will he reach him a serpent ? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father, who is in heaven, give good things to them that ask Him ?* We ought to seek first the kingdom of God and His justice, and as to all other things that are truly good and expedient, if we ask them as we ought they will be granted to us, not indeed always at the moment, and in the manner and measure we desire, but at the time, and in the manner God knows they will be of most real service to us. We ought, therefore, to make His holy will the sole rule and measure of all our desires, and take care not to provoke Him by our impatience, murmurs, or complaints, to lay aside the tenderness of a father, and grant us in His justice, what we ask to our own prejudice. Spiritual blessings, such as the grace of God, the great gift of final perseverance, the remission of our sins, a happy death, strength to resist temptations, and the like, are to be prayed for absolutely, in imitation of the Royal Prophet, who says : *One thing I have asked of the Lord, this will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life*—Ps. xxvi. 4. But temporal blessings, such as wealth, health, and the goods of fortune, which are liable

to be abused, should not be prayed for otherwise than conditionally, if the Lord sees that they are conducive to His own honor, and expedient for the salvation of our souls.

Perseverance is the last condition of a good prayer ; for as it is the crown of virtue, so it gives the finishing stroke to the efficacy of prayer. Christ marks out this condition in the parable of the man, who, after coming to his friend's house at midnight, to borrow three loaves, was at first refused, but by continuing to beg, and knock at the door, got admittance at length, and obtained his request (Luke xi.); and again, in the parable of the poor widow, who, by her importunities and repeated entreaties, prevailed upon the unjust judge to do her justice—Luke xviii. The Cananean woman, likewise, overcame our Blessed Saviour by her importunity, and forced Him, by a holy violence, to grant to her perseverance what He had denied to her first prayer. The blind beggar-man, also, on the road of Jericho, was not restored to his sight the first time he cried out, *Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me*: but when he raised his voice higher, and redoubled the fervor of his prayer, his unwearied perseverance became a kind of violence, that moved Christ our Lord to enlighten the eyes both of his soul and body. It is evident, then, that God is willing to be importuned, and that if He sometimes defers granting our requests, it is to make us sensible of the value of His gifts, to try our fidelity and submission, to reward our patience, to make us redouble our fervor, and continue striking at the gate of mercy until it is opened. Those who put their trust in Him, and pray with the necessary dispositions, are never confounded, but are sure, sooner or later, to receive the effects of His goodness ; so that if our prayers in general often prove fruitless and ineffectual, it is our own fault ; it is because they are defective in some respect ; it is because they are not duly performed, or attended with the proper qualities or conditions ; it is because we pray for things that are inexpedient or prejudicial to our salvation ; it is because we render ourselves unworthy of receiving what we sue for ; it is, in fine, because we do not pray for what we ought, nor in the manner we ought, according to these words of St. James in his catholic epistle (iv. 3): *You ask, and receive not, because you ask amiss.*

O merciful Jesus, who has promised that they who ask shall receive, vouchsafe to pour forth into our hearts the true spirit of prayer, and grant that we may perform this heavenly exercise in a manner acceptable to Thee, so as to experience the effects of Thy goodness, and the

truth of Thy promises, in the success of our petitions. Possess our souls with a sacred awe of Thy divine presence. Give us the spirit of fervor and devotion, that our prayers may ascend like a sweet incense, and find acceptance in Thy sight ; for by uniting ourselves thus here on earth with the choirs of Thy blessed angels and saints, in the homage which they pay Thee in heaven, we may confidently expect to join them hereafter, in singing Thy immortal praises for a never-ending eternity. Which, my dear brethren, I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

SUNDAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF THE ASCENSION.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF SALVATION.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. Earnestness of men in the affairs of this world, and indifference to their salvation in the next.
- II. Eternal salvation the most important of all things.
- III. Eternal salvation is an individual's only affair.
- IV. Conclusion, with a prayer for eternal salvation.

Quid prodest homini, si mundum universum lucretur, animæ vero suæ detrimentum patiatur?—St. Matt. c. xvi. v. 26.

What doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul.—St. Matt. c. xvi. v. 26.

To see men so industrious, so occupied, so active and vigilant in their worldly pursuits, one might say that they seem to labor for an endless series of years and for treasures, the possession of which could insure for them a true and permanent felicity ; for can it be supposed that so much care, so much bustle, so much agitation and anxiety, are only designed for the acquisition of a fortune, the duration of which can scarce equal the duration of the pains which are taken to acquire it, and that a life so rapid should be passed away in seeking with so much fatigue those perishable goods, which must be abandoned at the hour of death. And yet this mistake, which appears so palpable, is become the error of the greatest part of mankind. Temporal views influence almost all their actions. The perishable treasures of fortune, which are often

possessed with no less disquiet of mind than they are acquired with anxiety, captivate their hearts, command their whole attention, and furnish their lives with ample matter of care and speculation. But should not religion furnish us with sentiments more noble, more sublime? Does it not propose to us an eternity of bliss, as an object more worthy of our care and attention? Does it not unmask the imposture of all transitory allurements, and lay open the vanity of all terrene objects? Does it not tell us that what is fleeting deserves not our esteem? And that though we arrive at the highest degree of happiness here on earth, we are then perhaps at the eve of our death, and at the very gates of eternity? Why, then, do we confine our thoughts so much within this world, and make so small a provision for the world to come? Does not common prudence teach us that what is our greatest interest is what we should have most at heart, and that the affair of salvation, well managed, is what will redound most to our advantage? This affair, therefore, should chiefly engage our attention, and yet of all affairs it is what is most overlooked by the generality of Christians. To dissuade you from this deplorable mistake and culpable neglect, is the design of the following discourse. It is to persuade you to prefer salvation to all other affairs, because it is of all other affairs the most important—nay, of all affairs it is your only affair. Of all affairs it is the most important; this shall be the first point. Of all affairs it is your only affair; this shall be the second point, and the whole subject of your favorable attention. Let us implore the light of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, &c. *Ave Maria.*

The whole life of the greatest part of mankind passes away in the pursuit of the transitory goods of this world, without thinking seriously on eternity, or attending properly to the grand affair of salvation. In vain does religion call us to more solid cares and to more serious occupations; in vain does experience teach us that to amass the perishable goods of fortune is but like amassing a great heap of sand, which the first shock scatters, and which decreases in proportion as we endeavor to add to it; in vain does the Almighty Himself assure us that the day of our greatest elevation is but the eve of our fall. The cares of temporal affairs, in spite of religion and all its maxims, are the most serious occupations of the life of man. It is only for the concerns of the soul that we are idle and inactive. We are careful, assiduous, and vigilant for all the rest. Nothing discourages us in the pursuit of our worldly

interest. Perils, fatigues, perplexities, labors, hazards, the intrigues of rivals—nothing, in fine, can stop, nothing can shake our resolution. But when we are to labor for the salvation of the soul, and contend for a happy eternity, alas! we are feeble, cold, and indifferent, though there is nothing that we should undertake with greater ardor, since, of all affairs, the affair of salvation is the most important. Because it is such, that if it alone succeeds, though we should fail of success in every other affair, we shall be completely happy; and if it alone should miscarry, though we should be fortunate in all the rest, we shall be entirely and eternally unhappy. Hence Christ our Lord says in the Gospel: *What doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?*—Matt. xvi. 26.

To save your souls, my brethren, is the capital point for you. As for the rest, though you should be reduced to the lowest condition; though you should live here in sufferings, in misery, and contempt; though you should be stripped of all your worldly possessions; though you should be without succors, without friends, accused, condemned, and persecuted as the scorn and outcast of men—all this is nothing if you arrive at length at the happy term of salvation, because you will then find a glory that will amply indemnify you for all the disgraces of the world, a glory infinite, a glory immortal, a glory without end. You will then find a treasure which will amply indemnify you for all the miseries of the world; for you will possess God Himself, who will be your treasure—an inexhaustible treasure in the kingdom of Heaven. In short, you will then find a repose that will amply indemnify you for all the labors and sufferings you endure in the world, for you will enjoy a complete and consummate happiness without end, without interruption, without the least solicitude, the least trouble, the least molestation. But if you lose your souls, how deplorable will your condition be? Consult yourselves on this head, consult reason, consult religion, consult your own conscience on this important affair. Ask the rich man mentioned in the Gospel, who at the sad moment of his death was buried in the flames of hell, what did all the false happiness of the world avail him, when it was followed by everlasting misery? Learn true wisdom at the expense of so many other reprobates who are now condemned to eternal torments. They can well instruct you, as they are fully convinced of their folly by their own woeful experience. Hear how they lament their unhappy lot; hear how they bewail and regret their misfortune in the fifth chapter of the Book of Wisdom: We have lived in

the world in credit and splendor, in abundance and in pleasures ; but, O perishable riches, O seducing pleasures, which we eagerly sought for, in order to content our sensual appetites, what do you now avail us ? Will you serve to mollify the pains we suffer, or to moderate the heat of those scorching flames which now surround, burn, and devour us ? Heretofore we treated as folly the piety and devotion of those faithful servants of God, who labored to insure for themselves a happy eternity. We looked on them as weak, timorous, scrupulous, and superstitious souls. Fools that we were, we mocked, despised, and ridiculed them ; but death has justified them and confounded us. It has opened our eyes and made us see our mistake. A vain show of worldly happiness has deceived and seduced us. We have strayed from the ways of truth, and we have lost our God forever without resource. It is thus that the damned souls will forever lament their deplorable condition, and unprofitably regret their loss of salvation. Let their misery and distress be a warning to you, my brethren, and teach you to be more solicitous in future than you are in providing for the welfare of your immortal souls ; for what will it avail you to have been great, rich, wise, learned, and renowned in the world, if you are to be despicable, poor, and miserable in hell for a whole eternity ? Ah ! you will say one day, what is become of those projects of ambition, those parties of debauchery, those assemblies of libertinism, those diversions, those joys and delights, which I had more at heart than my salvation ? They have all passed away like a shadow ; but the sins of which they have been the occasion have not passed away. They still have a being ; they are not as yet effaced in the book of Divine Justice ; nay, perhaps they will remain always there, to draw down the heaviest vengeance that a just God can discharge on a criminal soul.

What charm then binds you, my brethren ? What enchantment seduces you ? You are wise and circumspect in every thing else, and it seems that you are stupid and insensible only in the affair of your salvation. You are attached to every other object, according as you are led by ambition, by interest, by curiosity, or by any other passion, and you scarce give a moment to the affair of eternity, and this affair which is of all the most considerable, is to you notwithstanding of all the most indifferent. You are passionately fond of things which are hurtful and unprofitable to you, and you interest yourselves but little for what is of infinite consequence to you, and for what you should be perpetually in action, perpetually in motion, perpetually in alarms. God has given

you your whole life to labor for the salvation of your soul ; He has judged that such a space of time was necessary to succeed in it, and you are pleased to judge otherwise ; for you pretend to be saved, though you scarce allow yourselves a few moments to be employed in the business of salvation. Thus you risk an infinite series of inexpressible bliss, and with tranquillity you expose yourselves to an endless series of unspeakable misery. You know that time is short, that life is uncertain, that death approaches, and that each moment may be your last ; and if this were your last moment, and you were cut off the face of the earth in the state of mortal sin unrepented, your eternal ruin would be inevitable. You have often made this terrifying reflection ; you have been reminded hereof a hundred times, and though you are now perhaps near the end of your career, yet the affair of your salvation is not the more advanced.

Ah, Christians ! is it not high time to be roused from the fatal insensibility which leads you on to endless ruin ? Is it not high time to exert yourselves strenuously in a business of such importance ? Remember that there is question of possessing or of losing God, of enjoying eternal happiness, or of being condemned to torments, dreadful in rigor, and eternal in duration ! Can we have any interest comparable to this ? Had not Solomon reason to say, that though man should live for many ages, and during that space of time should enjoy an uninterrupted series of prosperity, abounding in all the advantages of the most plentiful fortune, without the least pain, anxiety, or disquiet of mind, still in the midst of all this worldly happiness he ought never to lose sight of the days of eternity, which, when once arrived, will make him clearly see the vanity and nothingness of all earthly enjoyments and delights ; it is then he will clearly perceive how unprofitably he spent his time ; it is then he will be convinced that all his indefatigable labors in the management of his worldly concerns resembled only the occupation of the spider, that exhausts itself to make these slender cobwebs which serve only to ensnare little flies.

The Son of God tells you, and His ministers often repeat it, that it would avail you nothing to have made a conquest of the whole universe, if after all you come to lose your soul. All other losses are nothing in comparison of the loss of salvation ; all other losses can only deprive you of those goods of which you must be stripped in a short time, as soon as death closes your eyes. Other losses may be repaired and remedied, but the loss of salvation is irreparable and without resource. If

you die in a bad state, you will be condemned to eternal torments without remedy ; if you once unhappily fall into hell-fire, you will burn eternally in flames, for out of hell there is no redemption. Whoever is once damned, is damned for all eternity, without the least hope of relief or abatement in his pains. Is it not then the height of insensibility and blindness to neglect our salvation, to hazard an eternity of happiness, and make ourselves liable to an eternity of misery, for the vain, fleeting and deceitful satisfactions of this life, which vanish and disappear like a shadow ? Instead of losing our souls for things so trifling, and for advantages of so short a duration, the very enjoyment of which is mixed with much gall and bitterness, we should rather renounce every thing in this world than neglect the main chance, or lose sight of the grand affair of salvation, which of all affairs is the most important—nay, of all affairs it is to be considered as the only affair, as I promised to show in the second point.

That salvation is our only affair—that is, the only affair that deserves our constant care and application—is a truth frequently repeated in Holy Writ. It is recommended to us by our Divine Redeemer as *the only one necessary thing* that should engage our whole attention. It is it only that can properly be called our own affair. Our other concerns regard those who are to benefit by us, or to inherit the fruits of our industry ; but this entirely regards ourselves. Our other affairs may be useful, and may bring in some advantage and profit, but this is an affair of absolute and indispensable necessity. It is an affair of such moment and importance, that how fortunate soever we may be otherwise in all our enterprises, we not only gain nothing, but our All is lost forever if we succeed not herein. This is the affair with which God has charged every one of us in particular. It was not necessary that we should be created ; the world was long without us, and would have still subsisted, though we never had been in a state of existence ; but as it pleased the Almighty to give us a being, so he could not but ordain us for some end, and for what end more glorious than to serve Him here on earth, and to enjoy Him eternally in heaven hereafter ? All your actions, then, my brethren, should be performed with this view and directed to this end. This is the business which should occupy you morning, noon, and night ; this is an employment proper for all hours. In whatever state or condition you are, says St. Ambrose, be always attentive to the salvation of your soul, and take care to insure for yourself eternal happiness. Be not too solicitous about amassing the perish-

able riches of this transitory world ; be not embarrassed with a multiplicity of affairs, which, properly speaking, deserve not your attention ; at least, let not too much anxiety disquiet your mind, provided your salvation be in a prosperous way. Endeavor each day, says St. Paul, to make a progress in virtue. Pay every attention to your immortal soul, that precious talent which God has committed to your care ; that valuable treasure which Christ has purchased with His sacred blood ; that part of you, the most valuable, the most noble, and consequently the most worthy of all your care and attention. Spare no pains to preserve and save it. Abandon the rest to Providence. This is a personal affair for you. In a word, it is your only affair ; it is your only business in this world. Must all other affairs be, therefore, abandoned and neglected ? No, my brethren, but they must be all referred to the great and important affair of your salvation. This must be the centre of all your actions, the end of all your pursuits, and the ruling principle that should influence you in all your undertakings ; so that when I say your salvation is your only affair, I do not pretend that you are to neglect your temporal concerns, the welfare of your family, or the fruits of your industry. This would be to destroy all that Christian prudence, industry, and economy, which both religion and reason do recommend. But what I affirm is, that in the management of your worldly affairs you are to have your salvation always in view, to aim at it in all your pursuits, and to make it your only principal affair and chief study. All Christians, from the king to the beggar, are to discharge the duties of their respective stations with this view, and with an intention of pleasing God, and of being subservient to the designs of His Divine Providence. The merchant, the dealer, is to employ himself in trade and commerce, in order to execute the will and conform to the designs of the Almighty, who placed him in that state and condition of life. Fathers and mothers are to labor in their domestic concerns, through a motive of following the vocation of Heaven, and obeying the orders of Providence, which designed the labors, cares, and duties of their state as the means of their sanctification. The same may be said with regard to each different condition of life. It may be applied to the man of business in the midst of his worldly occupations, and to the ecclesiastic in the performance of the sacred functions of his ministry.

This plainly shows the extreme folly of sinners, who ruin and damn themselves in these very circumstances to which God has attached their salvation ; for what is there which may not be made conducive to this

end, by being duly referred to God and sanctified by a religious motive. Poverty and riches, adversity and prosperity, depression and elevation, sickness and health, may all contribute to accomplish the important business of salvation, by being made proper use of. Are you poor and destitute of the goods of fortune? Hear what the Saviour of the World says in the Gospel: *Blessed are the poor in spirit*; blessed are they who are not only poor in effect, but poor in spirit and in affection; blessed are the poor who are Christianly submissive in their poverty, and content in that low state wherein God has placed them; blessed are the poor, who support with patience their urging necessities and pressing wants, *for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven*. Are you rich, my brethren? Employ part of what you possess to make to yourselves friends of the mammon of iniquity, that they may procure you one day admittance into the eternal tabernacles of glory. Assist the miserable, relieve the distressed, who in cellars and garrets languish under the weight of sickness and the pressures of indigence, and you shall hear on the day of judgment this comfortable sentence, which will rank you amongst the elect: *Come ye blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom of Heaven; I was hungry, and ye gave me to eat; thirsty, and ye gave me to drink; naked, and ye clothed me; since whatever ye do to my little ones, I look upon it as done to myself in person*. Are you in adversity, my brethren? It only depends on you to sanctify it by your patience; and adversity thus sanctified is a sure pledge of eternal happiness; for, as St. Paul says, *Our momentary and light tribulation worketh in us above measure an exceeding and eternal weight of glory*. Are you in health? You are the better able to undergo the more painful exercises of religion, of piety, of mortification, and penance. Are you weak and infirm? Bear with resignation your weakness and infirmities. In fine, whatever is your state, situation, or condition, all may be of advantage to your eternal welfare, and contribute to the salvation of your souls, if you refer all your thoughts, words, actions, and designs to this great and glorious end.

And really, my brethren, what is more necessary than that the affair of your salvation should thus engage your whole attention, and be made the end of all your pursuits? Yet you must acknowledge that of all affairs this is what you seem most to neglect, and to have least at heart. What part of your life have you employed in this important business? How many years have you consecrated thereto? How many days? How many hours? I cannot think you would presume to

count upon those odd half hours you pass in the chapel, whilst you assist at the holy sacrifice of the Mass. You know how frequently you are distracted, and how little the affair of your salvation engage your attention, even at that juncture. Things altogether profane are often the subject of your thoughts ; your traffic, your domestic concerns, your diversions, and a thousand wandering ideas accompany you to the very foot of the altar, and occupy a great part of the time. What reason can you assign for this unchristian conduct, if it be not this, that you do not consider your salvation as your most important and your only affair ? If you are threatened with an expensive law-suit ; if a considerable temporal advantage is at stake ; if you are seized with a fit of sickness, you are occupied both day and night with the thoughts of your law-suit, with solicitude for your worldly interest, with the care of preventing the fatal consequences of your sickness ; but alas ! when your eternal interest is at stake, when your souls are dangerously ill, when they are mortally wounded, and all covered with the dismal leprosy of sin, when they are all disfigured and stripped of grace, when they are under the sentence of damnation, and nothing but the slender thread of life to suspend the execution of it ; in a word, when all that is terrible is to be feared, you then are unmoved and unconcerned. O deplorable infatuation ! If common prudence requires, that every necessary precaution should be taken to avert temporal misfortunes, and preserve the perishable life of the body, what should be done to escape endless misery, and insure life everlasting ! Should not all that is charming, all that is agreeable to our inclinations, be abandoned, if necessary, for this end ! The merchant and the mariner who in a violent storm find themselves under the necessity and sad alternative either of perishing, or casting into the sea all their valuable merchandise, do not deliberate long about the choice they are to make. Though it is all the fruit of a long voyage, and of numerous fatigues ; though it is all the hopes of their family ; though they see themselves upon the brink of being reduced to the lowest ebb of misery, they resolve immediately on throwing overboard and losing all the goods they have in the world, because they are persuaded that otherwise they must inevitably lose their life. Under these circumstances, and in this persuasion, they abandon the cargo of their ship without pain, or at least without hesitation. Should not their example influence your future conduct, my brethren, and persuade you to labor strenuously from the present moment for the salvation of your souls, cost what it will ? There is

nothing so precious, nothing so charming, nothing so dear to you in this world, but you should be determined to lose and abandon, rather than abandon the Lord your God, and lose your soul. There is nothing so difficult but you should be ready to undertake, nothing so painful but you should be willing to suffer, if necessary, to insure for yourselves a happy eternity.

O Almighty and Eternal God, preserve us from fixing our hearts and affections upon the false goods and empty enjoyments of this transitory life. Give us grace to consider always the eternal salvation of our souls as the most important of all our affairs, and to make it our constant study to seek Thy heavenly kingdom before all things. Grant us a lively faith, a firm hope, and an active charity, that will animate us to labor with zeal and perseverance in Thy service during the time of our sojourn here on earth, as by this means we may, at our dying hour, look with a well-grounded hope for that never-fading crown of glory which Thou hast promised to Thy faithful servants. And which I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

PENTECOST SUNDAY.

ON THE DESCENT OF THE HOLY GHOST.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. Connection of the Ascension of Christ with the Descent of the Holy Ghost.
- II. The Apostles changed and their labors successful through the Descent of the Holy Ghost.
- III. The manner in which the Apostles prepared themselves for the reception of the Holy Ghost.
- IV. Their example a lesson to us.
- V. Prayer to the Holy Ghost.

Cum complerentur dies Pentecostes, repleti sunt omnes Spiritu Sancto et cœperunt loqui.—Acts, c. ii. v. 1, 4.

When the days of Pentecost were accomplished, all the Disciples were filled with the Holy Ghost, and they began to speak.—Acts, c. ii. v. 1, 4.

THE solemnity of Pentecost is commonly called *Whitsuntide*, from the ancient custom of clothing catechumens, or newly-baptized Christians, in white garments, during the ensuing octave, in order to denote the sanctity and spotless innocence that the sacrament of Baptism con-

fers on the soul. The Church finds herself at this time happily situated between Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost, redeemed by the one and conducted by the other. Jesus Christ ascends into heaven to be the pledge and mediator of our eternal happiness: the Holy Ghost descends to the earth to be our guide and comforter in this vale of miseries. Jesus Christ mounts up into the celestial sanctuary, to complete the functions of His priesthood, and to perform the office of our advocate with the Father: the Holy Ghost comes down from the heavens to abide with the faithful to the end of the world, to teach them all truth, to inflame them with the fire of Divine love, and to prevent the Church from being ever overpowered by the gates of hell. Jesus Christ ascends in order to prepare a place for us above, and to form never-fading crowns for His elect and faithful servants: the Holy Ghost descends in order to animate us here below, to sustain the conflicts and gain the victories that must necessarily be gained before we can expect to be crowned. Jesus Christ, elevated to the bosom of His Heavenly Father, gives man a lasting proof and a well-grounded hope of future glory and immortality: the Holy Ghost penetrates to the heart of man to illumine and purify him with the rays of His all-powerful grace.

The descent of the Holy Ghost was the price of the sacred blood of Jesus Christ, a favor owing to His infinite merits, and the last seal of our redemption. The disciples were not fit to receive this Divine Spirit till after the visible departure of our Blessed Redeemer from this world; for, as St. Augustine remarks, they had so tender an affection and regard for their dear Lord and Master, that they could not bear His absence without great reluctance and being seized with sadness. This sensibility being the effect of nature rather than of grace, was sufficient to put a stop to the coming of the Holy Ghost, for which reason Christ told them (Johu, xvi. 7), *It is expedient to you that I go; for if I go not, the Paraclete will not come to you: but if I go, I will send him to you.* The descent of the Paraclete, the Holy Ghost, changed them in a moment into other men, purified their hearts and consumed the dross of their earthly affections; it inflamed them with zeal and gratitude, and banished all their apprehensions and all symptoms of fear and anxiety; it made them forget their own safety to publish their Master's divinity, and sacrifice their lives for His honor and glory, and for the establishment of His Church. To be convinced hereof, we need but turn our eyes toward Jerusalem, and consider attentively the glorious event which took place there this day, at the very time that the Jews were celebra-

ting the anniversary of the promulgation of their law on Mount Sinai. This is the interesting subject to which the Church calls our attention at present, and which I will endeavor briefly to lay before you in the following discourse. The wonderful change that the Holy Ghost wrought in the disciples of Christ on the day of Pentecost, and the astonishing success with which He blessed and crowned their labors, shall be the subject of the first point. The means whereby the Disciples prepared themselves for receiving the Holy Ghost, and by which we ought likewise to prepare ourselves for receiving His heavenly gifts and graces, shall be the subject of the second point. Intercede for us, O Blessed Mother of Jesus, that we may be made worthy of the promises of thy Beloved Son. For this end, my brethren, let us devoutly recite the angelical salutation. *Ave Maria.*

It is an article of faith, that the Holy Ghost is the third person of the most Holy Trinity ; that He proceeds from the Father and the Son as from one source ; that He is equal to both in power and glory, and every perfection, existing with the same divine nature and essence from all eternity. As the work of our creation is commonly attributed to the Father, and the work of our redemption to the Son, so the work of our sanctification is particularly attributed to the Holy Ghost, because He is the love of the Father and of the Son ; and it is from God's love that all grace, all sanctification, all virtue, flows and proceeds. We read in the Acts of the Apostles, ch. xix., that St. Paul, on his arrival in the city of Ephesus, found certain people there who told him they had not even heard that there was a Holy Ghost. None of you, I suppose, can plead the like ignorance, since, now-a-days, the very children in the streets may readily learn from the mouth of every common curser and swearer that there is a Holy Ghost. To swear by Him, is, alas ! become so fashionable and so favorite an oath with many, that we can scarce pass along the public ways without being almost deafened with the sound of it from every corner. To such a pitch is impiety raised at present, that not only men, but even women, whom modesty should characterize, are not content with blaspheming the *Holy Father*, and tearing the sacred name of *Jesus* to pieces every hour in the day. They have also begun to attack the *Holy Ghost*, and invoke Him frequently as a witness to their crimes and abominations ; for it is remarkable, that as they have been called to the light of the Gospel, and baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, they have at length found out the secret of blaspheming all the three

Divine Persons at once, as if they were resolved nothing should be wanting to secure their damnation. But let us leave such unhappy sinners to the mércy or justice of God, and return to our subject.

It was on the fiftieth day after the resurrection, and the tenth after the ascension of Jesus Christ, that the Holy Ghost descended on the Disciples when they were assembled together in the city of Jerusalem on the feast of Pentecost ; for, as the feast of the Jewish Pentecost prefigured the Christian Pentecost, and as the tables of the Law were given to Moses on Mount Sinai the fiftieth day after the children of Israel had been delivered from the bondage of Pharaoh, and had passed the Red Sea on their way to the Land of Promise, it was in like manner on the fiftieth day after the resurrection of Christ, who came to deliver mankind from the bondage of the infernal Pharaoh, and to conduct his children through the Red Sea of His precious blood to the true Land of Promise, that the Holy Ghost was pleased to descend and to promulge the New Law of the Gospel on Mount Sion in Jerusalem, about the ninth hour in the morning on a Sunday, when the Jews were commemorating their ancient Pentecost. There was this difference, however, between the giving of the Old Law to Moses and the New Law to the Disciples, that the one was engraved in tables of stone, the other was imprinted in the hearts of the faithful ; the one was given in the midst of thunder and lightning, the other under the outward appearance and visible form of fiery tongues ; for since the New Law is not a law of fear and terror, destined for slaves, but a law of charity and grace, destined for the children of God, it was expedient that it should be imprinted in the minds and written in the hearts of Christians by the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of Love.

The gates of heaven were accordingly opened on a sudden, and the riches of God's love and mercy were poured forth on the Disciples of Christ this day in the greatest abundance. *A noise or sound was formed in the air, says the Scripture, like a violent rushing wind, that filled the whole house where they were sitting, and the Holy Ghost descended visibly upon them in the shape of tongues of fire, to denote the gift of tongues with which He came to endow them, and the fire of charity which He came to enkindle in their hearts. He descended upon them as a spirit of light and truth, to instruct and teach them ; as a spirit of grace to sanctify them ; as a spirit of charity to qualify them in every respect for the sacred functions of the apostolic ministry. They were all replenished with the Holy Ghost, says the sacred text, and*

they began to speak with different tongues. They were all divinely inspired, all strengthened in their faith, all confirmed and fortified, all enriched with the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost. Their intellects were enlightened with the knowledge of supernatural truths, their wills were inflamed with the fire of divine love, and all the faculties of their souls were filled with heavenly benedictions.

It was thus that the following prediction of St. John the Baptist was accomplished : *I indeed baptize ye in water, said he, but he who is to come after me shall baptize ye in the Holy Ghost and fire.* It was thus that the merits of Jesus Christ crucified were crowned, and his promises fulfilled to the inexpressible joy of the Disciples, and to the great consolation of the faithful, but to the eternal shame and confusion of the incredulous Jews, who were astonished to hear a dozen poor illiterate fishermen by trade, who never had studied the Law, quoting the Scriptures and expounding the divine oracles with as much facility as if they were so many inspired angels that descended from heaven. Nothing was able to resist the force of their divine eloquence, and the spirit of wisdom that spoke through their mouths. The Scripture informs us that one of the heavenly spirits of the angelic order of the Seraphim purified the lips of the Prophet Isaias with a burning coal taken from the altar ; but the Holy Ghost purified the lips of the Disciples, and gave them tongues of fire capable of inflaming the frozen hearts of sinners, and melting them into compunction. Before the descent of the Holy Ghost they were a set of ignorant, weak, dastardly men. They were so timorous and cowardly, that when their Lord and Master was apprehended in the garden, they ran away and abandoned Him to the mercy of His merciless enemies—Matt. xxxvi. 56. After His resurrection, though He frequently appeared to them, in order to raise and cheer up their drooping spirits, yet they were so dull and slow of apprehension that all His discourses seemed enigmas or riddles to them. Even after His ascension they were still under such panics that they had not courage to appear in public, but remained shut up in a house at Jerusalem for fear of the Jews. But, O wonderful change ! as soon as the Holy Ghost shed His beams upon them, they issue forth with intrepidity like so many courageous lions, breathing forth flames of charity. They present themselves on a sudden in the streets of Jerusalem, with a design to reform the face of the universe. Nothing but an impulse of the Divine Spirit could animate them to undertake so arduous an enterprise, and nothing but the same spirit could execute it with instruments

so weak and disproportioned in appearance to the greatness of the design. But though weak of themselves, *they were able*, as the Apostle speaks, *to do all things in him who strengthens them*. They are so wonderfully illumined from above as to be able to penetrate the highest mysteries, to convince the most eloquent orators, and to confound the most learned philosophers. They are so amazingly fortified that they fear no dangers, they apprehend no perils, they dread no torments, they regard no threats or menaces, they despise the cruelties of the most violent persecutions and sufferings ; for the sweet name of Jesus has become the subject of their joy and of their glory—Acts v. 41. They zealously announce the mystery of the cross to every known nation under the heavens, as if they spoke to them in their own native language.

Peter, the chief and head of the Apostolic College, goes immediately to the elders of the Synagogue, to the Scribes and Pharisees, and to the magistrates of Jerusalem, and boldly reproaches them with having murdered their Lord and Messiah. A little before that, being questioned by the servant maid of Caiphas the High Priest, he trembled with fear, and shamefully denied Christ ; but now he values not the whole Sanhedrim of the Jews. He raises his voice with courage in a public assembly, and having commanded them to hearken to his words, he openly professes that the person called Jesus of Nazareth, whom they a few weeks before that had most unjustly executed like a malefactor, is the true Son of the living God. He exhorts them to repent, and to become adorers of Jesus, after having been his murderers ; and, blessed forever be the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, he converts at his two first sermons eight thousand souls to the Lord. The rest of the Apostles were fired with no less zeal. Death in its most terrifying shape was not able to deter them from the sacred functions of their ministry. They spread over the globe, each of them, like the angel mentioned in the Apocalypse, flying with his Gospel through the air, as the spirit guides them. The wondering earth is roused by the thunder of their voices ; their words resemble so many fiery darts that are shot from hearts inflamed with the love of God. The most populous and renowned cities of Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, even Rome itself, then the mistress of the world, hear with raptures the eloquence of these illiterate fishermen. The temples of the devils fell to the ground at the sound of their voice, as the walls of Jericho fell to the ground at the sound of the trumpets of Israel. In short, they made such a rapid progress, and preached the Gospel of Jesus with such wonderful success, that *their sound went into*

the whole earth, as the Scripture says, *and their words reached the remotest corners of the known world*, the Lord espousing the doctrine they preached as his own cause, and confirming it with numberless miracles. Thus, my brethren, the Church of Christ was originally planted, and in a few years established upon the ruins of Paganism and the destruction of the Jewish Synagogue. Thus the foundations of our holy religion were first laid, not in the course of the two or three last centuries, but upward of seventeen hundred years ago, and that not by men of dissolute lives, nor by the force of arms, nor by the severity of sanguinary laws, nor by the allurements of temporal advantages and worldly preferments, but the labors and preaching of Christ's own Apostles, aided and assisted by the Holy Ghost, who descended visibly upon them this day. We are, therefore, to regard the solemnity of Pentecost as the epoch of the Christian religion, and to celebrate it with spiritual joy as the anniversary of the birth of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church; that *pillar and ground of truth* against which the gates of hell never will be able to prevail. But whilst we devoutly contemplate the glorious mystery of this great festival, and gratefully acknowledge the goodness of the Lord our God in having called us to the pale of His Church, and to the admirable light of faith, by the ministry of his twelve Apostles and their lawful successors in office, let us briefly examine how they prepare themselves for receiving the Holy Ghost, that by following their example we may partake, in some degree, of the inestimable blessings that were so plentifully bestowed on them.

Every solemnity should inspire Christians with a devotion proper and suitable to the mystery which they solemnize. Thus the anniversary of our Blessed Redeemer's passion and death should inspire us with a firm resolution to die to sin, and to hate that foul monster which nailed the Son of God to an ignominious cross. The feast of His Resurrection should excite us to rise from the spiritual death of sin to a new life of grace and virtue, truly, really, and permanently. The feast of His Ascension should encourage us to disengage our hearts from the inordinate love of earthly things, and to aspire after our heavenly country, where Jesus Christ our head is gone before us, in order to draw our affections after Him. The present feast of Pentecost should, in like manner, excite us to have recourse to the most effectual means that may engage the Holy Ghost to descend into our souls, and take a permanent possession of our hearts; for the coming of this Divine

Spirit was not promised to the Apostles and primitive Christians only, but was designed for a blessing to be entailed on the faithful of all ages who are duly disposed to receive Him, and who oppose no obstacles to the operations of His Divine grace. *I will not leave you orphans*, said our loving Redeemer. *I will ask the Father, and he shall give you another Paraclete (or Comforter), that he may abide with you forever, the Spirit of Truth*—St. John xiv. 16, 17. We cannot prepare ourselves better for sharing in His gracious favors and blessings than by imitating the Disciples, who, immediately after the ascension of their Lord and Master, returned from Mount Olivet to the city of Jerusalem, where they assembled in the same place, and disposed themselves for the coming of the Divine Spirit by a spiritual retreat, and by persevering unanimously in prayer and heavenly contemplation. For the space of ten days they withdrew from the distracting noise and tumults of the world, and continued together in the strictest union and the most perfect harmony, constantly blessing and praising God with one heart and one spirit, and inviting the Holy Ghost into their souls by fervent exercises of piety and devotion. Such were their dispositions, and such also should our dispositions be, if we sincerely wish to partake of the precious gifts and graces that Heaven poured forth on them this day.

Before all things it is necessary to be free from mortal sin ; for the Holy Ghost will not come into a soul that Satan possesses by sin, nor dwell in a body that is defiled with impurity. The old leaven must be purged out, and the foul stains of sin must be washed off with the waters of penance, that our souls may become fit abodes and worthy temples of the spirit of sanctity. Our hearts must be cleared of all hatred, malice, and ill-will before the spirit of charity will take possession of them. The spirit of pride, the spirit of self-love, the spirit of the world must be banished and cast out before the Spirit of God will enter in ; for light is not more opposite to darkness than the Spirit of God is to the spirit of the world. All dissensions and animosities are to be laid aside, and we must be in peace and harmony with our neighbor ; for the spirit of concord and God of peace will not come where the spirit of discord reigns, nor will He descend into a heart that is embittered with rancor or envenomed with the spirit of anger and revenge. All these obstacles being therefore carefully removed, we are, like the Disciples, to enter into a kind of spiritual retreat from the distracting cares of the world, and to invite the Holy Ghost into our souls by devout and fervent prayers, especially such prayers as the

Angel Raphael recommended to Tobias—I mean *prayers accompanied with fasting and alms-deeds*, these being, as it were, the two wings that raise our petitions up to the heavens, and make them fly to the very throne of the Almighty. Behold, my brethren, the manner in which you are to prepare yourselves for the reception of the Holy Ghost, at this holy time of Whitsuntide, when the universal Church is unanimously petitioning the Throne of Mercy by a solemn fast, and by public prayers, which she offers up all over the world during the ensuing octave, for the descent of the Divine Spirit upon all her pastors, her clergy, and their respective flocks. It is true, the Holy Ghost does not at present descend visibly on the faithful in the figure of fiery tongues, nor always bestow on them the extraordinary and miraculous gifts which He conferred on the Apostles, these being now no longer necessary as they were in the infancy and at the first establishment of the Church. However, He still continues to this very day to descend really, though invisibly, into the souls of those who give themselves up to His divine influences, and are properly disposed, like the Disciples, for receiving the impressions of His grace. He is an inexhaustible fountain of goodness that flows incessantly, and will continue to flow every day unto the end of the world, till the number of the elect is completed. He is so rich in mercy, that His heavenly favors and blessings are neither confined to any time nor limited to any place. It is the Holy Ghost who infuses a spiritual life into us at our baptism, and animates our souls, as our souls animate our bodies. It is the Holy Ghost who produces in the just the life of faith, sentiments of hope, works of charity, and all the happy fruits that are mentioned by St. Paul—Galat. v. 22, 23. It is the Holy Ghost who *diffuses the love of God in our hearts*—Rom. v. 5. He sweetens our crosses and sufferings, gives us strength and vigor to discharge every Christian duty, and distributes His various gifts to the different members of the Church, *according to the measure of the giving of Christ*, as the Apostle speaks—Ephes. iv. 7. Hence St. Augustine concludes and says, that every day in the year may be a Pentecost for Christians, if they please, since they have it in their power to receive the Holy Ghost every day, by being well disposed and duly prepared to co-operate with His grace. If therefore, my brethren, any of you have been so blind to your own eternal welfare as to *resist the Holy Ghost* like the stiff-necked Jews; if you have been so unfortunate as to *sadden and extinguish* the Divine Spirit, or to banish this heavenly guest from the temple of your souls by giving

admittance to mortal sin, let me entreat you in the name of God to hearken to these Apostolic words, and practice this salutary advice, by which St. Peter converted no less than three thousand souls at one sermon on this festival: *Do penance and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.* O all-powerful Spirit! O burning furnace of divine love! O inexhaustible source and giver of all good gifts! O sweet comforter of all distressed souls! remove from us all obstacles to Thy grace, and dispose us for receiving Thy sacred influences. Descend, we beseech Thee, on Thy faithful servants assembled here this day in Thy name; come into our hearts and take full possession of them; enter into our souls and abide in them for ever, here by Thy grace and hereafter by Thy glory. Be Thou our guide, our light, and our strength; fortify the feeble, comfort the afflicted, animate the fearful, inspire the lukewarm with fervor, excite the languid to a feeling sense of their duty. Mollify the stony hearts of sinners, and bring back the strayed sheep to the narrow path of salvation. Quench the fire of our passions, heal our spiritual disorders, and consume in us the rust of all inordinate affections. Preserve us from ever splitting on the rock of presumption or despair, and grant us the great gift of final perseverance, that after partaking of Thy grace in this life, we may partake of Thy felicity in the next. Which, my brethren, I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

TRINITY SUNDAY.

ON THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

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| I. The Trinity and Unity of God. | IV. Its obligations. |
| II. Scriptural references to Baptism. | V. Its ceremonies. |
| III. Its necessity. | VI. Peroration. |

Euntes ergo docete omnes gentes, baptizantes eos in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti.—St. Matt. c. xxviii. v. 19.

Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.—St. Matt. c. xxviii. v. 19.

IN these words, which the Saviour of the world pronounced in His last discourse to His Apostles, we find included the summary of our faith, the basis of our religion, the character of our profession, and the

most august of all our mysteries ; and these words alone suffice to confound the Arians, Socinians, and all other ancient and modern unbelievers, who deny the unity of God in three distinct persons. St. John asserts the same truth (1. Ep. v. 7), where he expressly says : *There are three who give testimony in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one.* It is this faith that justifies sinners, sanctifies the just, baptizes the catechumens, fortifies and confirms the Christians, crowns the martyrs, consecrates the ministers of the altar, and saves the universal world. Hence the first lesson we learn in the school of Christianity is, that there is one God and three persons, equal in wisdom, power, and glory. No sooner has a child obtained the faculty of speaking, but he is taught to bless himself in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. It is by these sacred names of the adorable Trinity that every exorcism, consecration, and benediction is performed, all our sacrifices and prayers are offered, every good action is begun and ended, and our souls are sent forth at the awful hour of death, and recommended to the divine mercy, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, to denote that there is no grace, no justification, no salvation, but by the faith of Trinity. Without the belief of it we cannot understand the incarnation of the Son of God, or the mystery of our redemption ; nor was it possible for us to have the least idea of it if God had not vouchsafed to reveal it, it being impenetrable, unsearchable, incomprehensible, and infinitely above the reach of all human reason, though it is not against reason to believe it, since nothing can be more conformable to right reason than to believe most firmly what God has revealed, though reason be not able to comprehend or clearly understand it. It is indeed evident to reason itself, that there is only one God, and that there can be no more, two beings absolutely infinite and two universal sources of perfection implying a contradiction, which made St. Athanasius say, that *polytheism, or a plurality of gods, is atheism, or a nullity of gods* ; for two free all-powerful beings are incompatible and destroy each other, since the power of one could be restrained and his counsels discovered by the other. The very uniform design of the universe shows that there is but one only Author and Sovereign Ruler of all things ; none but the fool can deny it, as the Scripture says. We need but open our eyes to be convinced of the existence of this Supreme Being ; the heavens publish His glory, the sun announces His majesty, the stars proclaim His magnificence, and the whole universe discovers His infinite power, wisdom,

and providence. But the mystery of the Trinity is infinitely beyond the reach of every creature, and surpasses the capacity of all human understanding. The most subtle philosophers, and the brightest wits, after all their study and search of natural causes and effects for so many ages, could never attain to it ; nay, if you except some of the holy patriarchs and prophets, to whom it seems to have been notified by a special revelation, the Israelites and Jews, who were God's own chosen people, seem to have been strangers to this sublime mystery. An explicit and distinct knowledge of it was reserved for the children of the New Testament. With what awful respect ought we then to celebrate this day's solemnity, which is dedicated to the ever-blessed Trinity ? How gratefully ought we to acknowledge the infinite goodness and mercy of the Lord, in calling us to this admirable light of faith, and enrolling us among His true worshipers ? Such unlimited bounty should excite us this day to consecrate afresh the three powers of our souls, our memory, understanding, and will, to the Three Persons of the most Holy Trinity, and never to cease paying them an unfeigned homage of praise, love, and adoration, but to refer our whole being, our life, and all our actions to the honor and glory of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as the saints and angels do in heaven for all eternity. This is what we solemnly promised at the sacred font, when we were spiritually born in the Church, and baptized in the name of the most Holy Trinity. To animate you, therefore, to a faithful correspondence with these important duties, permit me to lay before you the signal grace and mercy bestowed on you at your baptism, and the weighty obligations which you have thereby contracted. Let us first implore the light of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, &c. *Ave Maria.*

St. Paul, speaking of the sacrament of Baptism (Ephes. v. 25, 26), says, that *Christ loved His Church and delivered Himself up for it, that He might sanctify it, cleansing it by the laver of water in the word of life :* And again (Tit. iii. 5), *He saved us by the laver of regeneration, and renovation of the Holy Ghost.* This is the sovereign remedy which His infinite goodness established for the remission of original sin, wherein we were all born. By virtue of it we are re-born, and receive a new life in Jesus Christ ; our souls are raised from a state of spiritual death, and restored to the life of grace ; and it is for this reason that baptism is called a sacrament of the dead. It is allowed to be a sacrament of the New Law, even by those who have rejected most of the other sacraments. Its necessity may be proved from the words of Christ

to His Apostles, when He commissioned them to teach and baptize all nations ; for He immediately adds : *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned* ; in which words He requires that all nations should believe the truths taught by the Apostles, and consequently be baptized, promising salvation, not to faith alone, but to faith and baptism together, which shows the necessity of the one as well as of the other. The necessity of baptism also appears evidently from St. John, where our Saviour expressly says, that *unless a man be re-born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God* ; from whence it follows clearly, that as no man can enter into this world, or enjoy a corporal life, except he be born of his carnal parents, so no one can enter into heaven, or attain to life everlasting, unless he be regenerated, or gets a second birth in Jesus Christ, by being baptized with the external element of water, and the internal virtue of the Holy Ghost ; for where actual baptism of water cannot be had, it must, at least, be in desire, there being but two cases in which the want of this sacrament may be supplied. The first is martyrdom, otherwise called *Baptism of Blood* ; the second is *Baptism of Spirit*, or *Baptism of the Holy Ghost*, that is, an ardent desire of receiving the sacrament of Baptism with a perfect repentance. Baptism was prefigured in the Old Law by the sacrament of Circumcision ; by the ark of Noah, at the time of the deluge, whereby the world was purged ; by the passage of the Israelites through the Red Sea, and their deliverance from the bondage of Pharaoh ; by the washing of Naaman, the Syrian, in the river of Jordan ; by the Probatica of Jerusalem ; and by the baptism of St. John the Baptist.

The necessity and obligation of receiving this sacrament commenced in general after our Saviour's ascension, when the Gospel was sufficiently promulged. It was then the Apostles began publicly to execute the commission given to them by their Divine Master, to teach all nations, and to administer baptism in water, without exception, to all persons, both young and old, that were converted to Christianity, even to such as had received the Holy Ghost, and consequently who had been already baptized by the Spirit, as we read in Acts ii., viii., ix., x., xvi., and xxii. Did we but seriously consider the gift of God, and the special favor He conferred on us, by calling us thus to the light of His Gospel and the pale of His Church, by the labors of His Apostles and their successors, we would be convinced that we can never return Him sufficient thanks for His mercy. It is so great a benefit, so signal a

grace, that it calls loudly upon us for the most grateful acknowledgment, and the most faithful correspondence on our part. Whilst thousands of others are left perishing in idolatry and in their native misery ; whilst they are out of the pale of the Church and excluded from the communion of saints ; whilst they are seduced by error, blinded by infidelity, and, as the Scripture expresses it, sitting in darkness and the gloomy shades of death ; whilst they are tossed to and fro by every blast of false doctrine and wandering away from the paths of salvation, the Lord in His infinite mercy has vouchsafed to call us to the true saving faith, and to place us in the bosom of His Church by the regenerative grace of our baptism. By means of this grace we have been made Christians and children of God, and heirs of everlasting life. By nature we have been conceived in iniquity, and born children of wrath and slaves of Satan, liable to eternal misery ; but by the grace of baptism we have been re-born the adoptive children of the Eternal Father, the brothers and co-heirs of Jesus Christ, and the living temples of the Holy Ghost. We have been rescued from the jaws of the infernal dragon, delivered from the bondage of sin, sanctified and consecrated by the sprinkling of the precious blood of our Blessed Redeemer. In short, we have been sealed with the unction of the Divine Spirit, raised to a royal dignity and priesthood, as St. Peter speaks (1 Ep. ii. 9), and advanced to the participation of the divine nature, when the character of a Christian was stamped on us, and imprinted in our souls at our receiving baptism, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. To denote these singular graces, advantages, and prerogatives of baptism, the Three Persons of the most Holy Trinity appeared at the time our Saviour was baptized by St. John in the river Jordan ; the Father, by the voice that was heard, saying, *This is my beloved Son* ; the Son, under the form of man ; and the Holy Ghost, under the form of a dove ; the heavens at the same time opening, to give us to understand that baptism not only constitutes us the adoptive sons of God, and restores to us the innocence of a dove, but also opens the gates of heaven for us, and gives us an unquestionable right and title to the enjoyment of eternal glory.

The character of a Christian is, of course, a character of holiness ; a character of such honor, eminence, and dignity, that, as St. Augustine says (1, 5 de civ. c. 10), the Emperor Theodosius justly looked upon all the honors, dignities, and pompous titles of the world as nothing in comparison with it. It is so noble a character that St. Lewis, King of

France, preferred the honor of being a Christian to that of being monarch of one of the most flourishing kingdoms of the earth ; for which reason he always paid more attention and regard to the title which he took from the place of his baptism than to that which he derived from the place of his coronation. The character of baptism is, in fine, a permanent and indelible character, that does not vanish or forsake a person at the hour of death, but follows him to the tribunal of God, and remains like a spiritual mark, or seal, imprinted in his soul for all eternity, either for his greater glory in heaven, if he lives up to it on earth, or for his greater confusion in hell, in case his life be not answerable to its dignity, or does not correspond to the weighty obligations and duties that are thereto annexed.

And really, as the dignity of a Christian and child of God is so very eminent, the obligations that attend this dignity are great in proportion, and require that we should demean ourselves in a manner becoming so exalted a rank and worthy of so noble a character. The renowned St. Basil says, that whosoever has received the baptism of the law of grace, has obliged himself by an irrevocable and indispensable contract to imitate Jesus Christ, to copy after the virtues of His most holy life, and to endeavor to resemble Him as an image resembles its original. This is our duty in quality of Christians and disciples of Christ. *We are to see and do according to the example he has set before our eyes ;* as the Scripture says, *Exod. 25. We are to be clothed with Jesus Christ,* as St. Paul speaks, *3 Galat. We are to learn from Him to be meek and humble of heart ; we are to take up our cross and follow him ; we are to bear a resemblance of his mortification in our mortal bodies ;* for as He is our head, we His members ; He our pastor, we His flock ; He our pontiff, we His Church ; He our Divine Master and legislator, we His people, His conquest, and the price of His blood. If there be no likeness or resemblance of Him in us, though we should otherwise have all the perfections of angels, God will not acknowledge nor count us in the number of His elect, since, according to St. Paul, *those who are predestinated by him must be conformable to the image of his Son.* They must walk in His footsteps by an imitation of His virtues, and an inviolable observance of His laws ; they must renounce their own will, and seek to do in all things the will of God ; they must curb and correct their passions and natural inclinations by self-denial and mortification, if they mean to support the glorious character and dignity of disciples of Jesus Christ ; for, as the Apostle teaches (*Gal. v. 24*), *They*

who are of Christ have crucified their flesh with their vices and concupiscences ; from whence it follows that such as do not comply with these necessary duties are excluded from the number of His disciples, and, of course, from the participation of His glory. This is what made Tertullian call a Christian who lives up to his character a man crucified and dead to the pomps of the world and the deeds of the flesh—that is, to his own corrupt inclinations and passions. Wherefore, to be a Christian, it is not sufficient to believe in Jesus Christ, and make outward profession of his doctrine, but it is likewise necessary to observe his law, and avoid everything that it forbids, and omit nothing it commands ; for as every one who formerly received circumcision incurred thereby a strict obligation to fulfill all the precepts of the Jewish law (Gal. v. 3), so in like manner every one that is regenerated in the laver of baptism is bound to keep all the commandments and precepts of the Gospel, to serve God in spirit and truth, and to edify his neighbor by the good odor of Christian virtues and an innocent life. Hence when our Saviour said to his Apostles, *Go and baptize all nations, &c.*, he immediately added, *Teach them to observe whatever I commanded you* ; to give us to understand that we must square our actions according to His law, join obedience to the purity of our belief, and honor our faith by the holiness of our lives.

It is to inculcate these obligations, as well as to represent the graces and wonderful effects of baptism, that the Church, ever since the earliest years of Christianity, has made use of so many sacred ceremonies in the solemn administration of this sacrament. Among the rest, in former ages, the newly baptized were clothed in white garments for the space of eight days, during which time they appeared daily in the Church with a crown or garland on their heads, and a burning light in their hands. According to the modern discipline, the heads of such as are baptized are covered with a white linen cloth, and a lighted taper is put into their hands ; the one to denote the innocence and purity required in a Christian, the other to signify the fire of charity with which his heart ought to be always inflamed, and the light of faith and good example whereby he ought to shine in the Church of God, that, like the five prudent virgins in the Gospel, he may always be in readiness to go and meet Jesus Christ, the divine bridegroom, to whom his soul was espoused at baptism, and to answer His call at whatsoever hour He shall invite him to the nuptials of His heavenly kingdom. Hence it is that the baptizing priest says to the baptized Christian : *Receive this*

white garment, which mayest thou carry unstained before the judgment seat of our Lord Jesus Christ, that thou mayest have eternal life. Amen. And again: Receive this burning light, and keep thy baptism without reproof. Observe the commandments of God, that when our Lord shall come to His nuptials thou mayest meet Him, together with all the saints, in the heavenly court, and mayest have life eternal. Amen.

As for the solemn renunciation of Satan, and of his works, and of his pomps, which is then made, it deserves our particular attention; for it is a vow and promise made in the face of the Church, and in the presence of God and His angels. It is an indissoluble contract and alliance, whereby we have engaged ourselves to abandon the party of the devil, to have nothing to do with his works, that is, with the works of darkness and sin, and to cast away from us his pomps, that is, the maxims, modes, and vanities of the world. It is, according to the Roman Catechism, p. 1 a. 2 n. 20, a holy and solemn profession, by which we have devoted ourselves to the service of the Blessed Trinity, as a religious man devotes himself to the service of God, by entering into a religious order, or as a priest devotes himself to the service of the altar by receiving ordination. It is, in fine, a covenant or spiritual wedding like that of a bride with her bridegroom, contracted with God, in virtue of which we on our part swear allegiance to Him, promise never to abandon His cause, renounce His faith, or deny His religion, but to combat vigorously under the banner of the Cross against the most dangerous enemies of our souls—the devil, the world, and the flesh: to make always a steady and sincere profession of the great truths of Christianity, not by words only, but by the constant practice of good works; and God, on his part, promises us life everlasting if we prove faithful to our engagements, and preserve the white robe of our baptismal innocence pure and undefiled to the hour of death.

These engagements and vows we are bound to ratify and fulfill when we come to the use of reason, as the Council of Trent teaches, Sess. 7, because they were made by our godfathers and godmothers in our name at the baptismal font. The holy Fathers and other spiritual writers advise all Christians to renew their baptismal vows every year on the anniversary of their baptism, and also on the grand solemnities of Easter and Whitsuntide, and on the feast of the most Holy Trinity. St. Gregory Nazianzen, Orat. 39, informs us that the Greek Church celebrates a particular festival for this purpose, which they call the holy

feast of lights. St. Bernard, Conc. 1 de dedic. Eccl., says that we ought to look upon the feast of the dedication of the Church as a day appointed for returning thanks every year to the Lord for the benefit of our vocation to Christianity, and for having consecrated the temples of our souls by the grace of baptism. St. Charles Barromæus, Conc. 6, says, that the faithful ought to be admonished to pay unto the Lord an annual tribute of praise and thanksgiving on the anniversary of their baptism, and to spend that day in works of piety and devotion, such as renewing their baptismal engagements, meditating on the goodness of God in having brought them to this great sacrament, reflecting seriously on the weighty obligations they have thereby contracted, and fervently imploring grace to fulfill them. And really if the Israelites were ordered by Moses (Exod. xiii.) to keep a solemn feast every year in perpetual memory and thanksgiving for the benefit of their deliverance from the Egyptian bondage, and their miraculous passage through the Red Sea, how much more reason have we to celebrate in a particular manner the anniversary of our baptism every returning year, in grateful remembrance of the signal mercies of our God, who on that day vouchsafed to deliver us from the bondage of sin, to wash and purify us in the blood of the immaculate Lamb, Jesus Christ, and to exalt us to the imminent dignity of His adoptive children ?

Woe, nay, double woe to us, if, after having received so many signal favors and blessings from Heaven, we shamefully degenerate from the character and dignity of Christians, and perfidiously violate the promises we have made ! It were better for us never to have been regenerated in the waters of baptism, never to have borne the glorious title of Christians, *never to have known the way of justice*, as St. Peter speaks (2 Ep. ii. 21), *than after the knowledge to turn back again*, to strike a league with hell, and dissolve the covenant we made with God. Alas ! the manifold graces we have received will only serve to render us the more accountable to the Divine Justice, if we receive them in vain. They are so many funds of obligations, so many talents intrusted to us, and for which we shall be called to a more strict account, if, instead of improving them to the honor of God, the edification of our neighbor, and the advantage of our own souls, we abuse them to the dishonor and scandal of the Christian name. The very faith we profess will serve for our greater confusion, and be the rule of our condemnation, if we do not conform our conduct to it. The white robe with which we are clothed at our baptism will appear against us at the last day, and re-

proach us with our infidelity ; nay, as the holy Fathers speak, it will be dipped in a pool of fire and brimstone, and contribute to increase the torments of wicked Christians and Catholics in hell's devouring flames. The crimes they commit will be deemed more grievous and more deserving of punishment on account of the base ingratitude, contempt, treachery, and perfidiousness which they imply. Their baptismal vows, their own consciences, the priest who baptized them, the angels who were witnesses, will bear testimony and demand vengeance for the abuses and profanations of their baptism ; nay, as the Gospel says, the very Ninivites and other infidels will then rise up in judgment against them, and convict them of perjury and apostacy. The numerous tribes of barbarians who are deprived of the grace of baptism, and have not the happiness to know God, may plead some excuse, and expect some mitigation of their punishment ; but *the servant who knows the will of his master, and does it not, shall be beaten with many stripes.* The Christian who is enlightened with the light of faith, and does not live up to his profession, *but confessing God with his mouth, denies him by his actions,* will have nothing to say in his own defense, but will be liable to a far greater punishment than either Jews or heathens ; for, as the holy character of priesthood aggravates the guilt of a priest, if he dishonors it by the irregularity of his life and the corruption of his morals, so in like manner the holy character of baptism, profaned and dishonored by a wicked life, renders a Christian more criminal, and will cover those at the last day with everlasting shame and confusion, who, after being washed in the blood of Jesus, after being made members of His mystical body, and after being favored with so many means and opportunities to work their salvation, have ungratefully trampled under foot the most sacred laws of God and His Church, and replunged themselves into the bondage of Satan. Grant, O merciful Jesus, that we may conform our lives to the sanctity of our state, and model our actions upon the laws of Thy Gospel. If hitherto we have sinned against Heaven and earth, and rendered ourselves unworthy to be called Thy children, if unhappily we have made a shipwreck of our baptismal innocence and violated our vows, we return to Thy mercy in the bitterness of our souls, and most humbly beseech Thee to pardon us what is past, and preserve us from future relapses. O most holy and undivided Trinity, we adore and glorify Thee for having called us to the wonderful light of faith, and incorporated us by the grace of our baptism in the pale and bosom of Thy Church. Give us grace to become worthy members of so illustrious

a body, that we may edify our neighbor, and promote Thy honor and glory by the sanctity of our lives and by the purity of our morals, until we have the happiness to see and enjoy Thee in the kingdom of Thy glory. Which I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON THE NECESSITY AND SIGNAL ADVANTAGES OF ALMS AND WORKS OF MERCY.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. Introduction on the laws of charity shown forth in the Providence of God.
- II. The obligation and necessity of alms-giving.
- III. The utility and advantages of alms-giving.
- IV. An appeal for the poor and helpless.

Estote misericordis, sicut et Pater vester misericors est.—St. Luc. c. vi. v. 36.

Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.—St. Luke, c. vi. v. 36.

HEAVEN and earth, and all the wondrous works of the universe, proclaim the existence of an all-wise Providence which presides over all things, preserves regularity and perfect order in all things, and extends its attention and care to every part of the creation, even to the birds of the air, to the fish of the sea, to the beasts of the field, and to the very least and the most minute insects. By Providence I mean the eternal will, infinite wisdom, power, and goodness of God, by which He directs, governs and supports all His creatures according to His own wise purposes, and conducts them to their term or last end by such means as He knows to be the best adapted and the most suitable thereto. It is our indispensable duty to adore, obey, and second the views and designs of His Divine Providence with an unlimited dependence and submission. Whether He thinks proper to place us in a high or a low station of life, in health or in sickness, in prosperity or in adversity, in affluence or in poverty, we are to rest satisfied with our condition, to bow down and conform to His holy will, to receive all things as coming from His blessed hands, and to be firmly persuaded that He orders all things sweetly and for our real benefit and greater advantage; for, as the Royal Prophet says (Ps. cxliv. 9), *The Lord is sweet to all, and*

His tender mercies are over all His works ; and again (Ps. cii. 13), As a father hath compassion on his children, so hath the Lord compassion on them that fear Him. The grand end and view of God's Providence in the dispensation of the goods of this world to mankind being the eternal salvation of their souls, it appertained to His wisdom to establish a variety of states and conditions, and to place some in a more exalted station, others in a more humble ; some at the head of the community, others at the feet ; some in the possession of riches, others under the pressure of indigence ; that, by assisting each other and fulfilling the different duties and functions of their respective states, they might all attain the great and happy end for which they have been sent into the world. If there was a perfect equality in the states and conditions of men, if all were upon the same level and footing, who would take upon themselves the painful but necessary tasks of life ? If all were masters, who would serve them ? If all were servants, who would employ them ? If all were poor, who would supply their wants ? If all were equally rich and at their ease, who would work for them ? Who would apply to hard labor and useful industry ? Who would till and cultivate the earth in the sweat of his brow ?

In the beginning indeed, God made all things common, and commanded the earth to bring forth its fruits spontaneously, that every one might partake of them according to his necessity ; but in process of time, sin and the corruption of man's heart rendered it necessary to make a division of earthly goods into unequal shares, and to consign a larger portion of them to some and a smaller share to others. By this wise arrangement peace and subordination are preserved in human society, anarchy and confusion are prevented, daily labor and honest industry are promoted and rewarded. The rich and the laborious are rendered mutually dependent, and this mutual dependence serves as a link to form a closer union between them, and to engage them to be useful and serviceable to each other, like members of the same body.

But what means of subsistence has Divine Providence ordained for the distressed poor who are past their labor, incapable of applying to honest industry, and who have neither health nor strength to earn their daily bread in the sweat of their brow ? Have they any reason to murmur against Heaven, or to complain of the economy of Providence, as if they were forgotten in the distribution of its gifts ; No, my brethren, the Father of Mercies has not abandoned or forgotten them, though for His own wise reasons He has not judged it expedient to

deposit in their hands the perishable riches of this transitory life, which are generally abused and made instrumental to sin. If He leaves them in a state of poverty, it is that they may have an opportunity to atone for their sins, to sanctify their souls, to secure their salvation, and to merit everlasting happiness by their patience, humility, and resignation. In the interim, He has taken care to provide sufficiently for their corporal necessities, by giving them a just right and title to have their wants supplied out of the abundance of the rich ; for He has appointed the rich to be the trustees, stewards, and co-operators of His Providence, and has absolutely commanded them, as Sovereign Lord and Master of all they possess, to relieve the distressed poor by alms-deeds, according to their respective abilities and wants. To convince you of these important truths, and to induce you to a faithful and cheerful compliance with so essential a duty, is the design of the following discourse. The strict obligation and indispensable necessity of giving alms shall be the subject of the first point. The great utility and signal advantages that accrue from giving alms, particularly toward the clothing, supporting, and educating poor little orphans and helpless children, shall be the second point, and the subject of your favorable attention. Let us previously implore the light of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, &c. *Ave Maria.*

Since an unequal division of the goods of this life has necessarily taken place in the world, the earth is no longer common to men, as the sea is to the fish, the air is to the birds, and the forests are to the quadrupeds. The peace of society and the good order of civil government require that each individual should be secured in the quiet and undisturbed possession of the portion of worldly substance which he lawfully acquires, or which naturally devolves to him by inheritance. With regard to other men, he is therefore to be considered as the just proprietor and the full master of what he thus possesses ; but with regard to Almighty God, he is no more than a steward and dispenser, and of course he is obliged to make such use of what is deposited in his hands, as God, the Sovereign Lord and Master of all things, wills and commands. The more he has received from the giver of all good gifts, the stricter account he will be called to on the last day, if he misapplies the talents committed to him to be improved, or wastes and lavishes in extravagancies what Providence was pleased to intrust to his care for the relief and support of his poor fellow-creatures, who are equally children of the same Heavenly Father, and destined to be partakers of the

same heavenly glory hereafter. In effect, my brethren, nothing is more inconsistent with the great principles of equity and justice which the Author of Nature has implanted in the very fund of our being, and stamped on every rational soul, than to squander the blessings of Heaven in supporting pride and gratifying the inordinate cravings of self-love, whilst the poor are actually sinking under the heaviest pressures of want and indigence, and exposed to all the rigors of hunger and thirst, of nakedness and cold. If we consult our own natural reason, it will tell us that men living together in community and assembled in society, should do unto others what they would reasonably wish to have done to themselves, and consequently that they should not suffer those of their own species to languish in extreme poverty and perish for want of the common necessities of life, whilst they themselves wallow in riches and live in every kind of luxury ; but that, on the contrary, they are bound by the law of nature to relieve their neighbor under his grievances according to their ability, as they would wish to be relieved themselves were they in a similar situation. This is a principle which no one contradicts. The Scythian, the Barbarian, the Jew, and the Gentile, agree herein with the Christian. This is a duty that nature, that humanity, that instinct, that reason inspires and dictates. But as the voice of nature and the light of reason are not always attended to, the Almighty has been pleased to inculcate this duty in the clearest and strongest terms, both in the Old and New Testament, and to give the rich to understand that they are not at liberty to hoard up their riches avariciously in their coffers, or to make such use as they please of their superfluities, but they are to consider them as the gifts and talents of a wise and benign Providence, which in bestowing such plenty and abundance on them, and confining others within such narrow circumstances, proposed to itself an end worthy of itself, and intended that the *superfluities of the rich should be the patrimony of the poor*, as St. Augustine observes. Hence the Scripture calls the alms given to the poor a debt, and the refusal of it a defrauding of the poor. *Son*, says the Lord (Eccles. iv. 1, 8), *defraud not the poor of alms, and turn not away thy eyes from them ; bow down thy ear cheerfully to them, and pay what thou owest*. And again (Deut. xv. 11), *I command thee to open thy hand to thy needy and poor brother, that liveth in the land ; and again (v. 7), thou shalt not harden thy heart, nor close thy hand, but shalt open it to the poor man ; and again (Eccles. xxix. 12), Help the poor because of the commandment, and send him not away empty-handed*

because of his poverty ; and again (Isai. lviii. 7), Deal thy bread to the hungry, and bring the needy and the harborless into thy house ; when thou shalt see one naked cover him, and despise not thy own flesh.

All this plainly shows that the poor have acquired from God a just right and title to be supplied with the necessities of life out of the abundance of the rich, and that to give alms to them in order to solace their wants is not a simple counsel nor a mere work of supererogation, but an indispensable duty and a formal precept of the Sovereign Lord and Master of the Universe, who has appointed the rich His agents and economists, and has placed them, like Joseph, over the treasures of Egypt, for the purpose of supplying the wants of His people, and succoring them in the hour of distress. To neglect the poor, therefore, in their distresses, or to withhold and refuse them what has been thus given and appropriated for their relief, is to oppose the ordinance of Heaven, and to counteract the designs of Divine Providence. It is to commit an act of injustice in the sight of God, similar to that of the unjust steward in the Gospel, who embezzled what the master of the family had intrusted to his care for the use and support of the domestics and lower servants of the house. It is also an open breach of charity in both its branches ; for, as the Scripture says, *He that hath the substance of this world, and shall see his brother in need, and shall put up his bowels from him, how doth the charity of God abide in him ?*—1 Ep. St. John, iii. 17. What is more, he is guilty of a breach of the fifth commandment, *Thou shalt not kill*, when through his neglect his neighbor dies for want ; which made St. Ambrose say, *Si non pavisti, occidisti* : Feed those who are famishing with hunger. If thou hast not fed them, thou hast killed them ; thou art guilty in the sight of God of as many murders as there are poor in extreme necessity, who perish with hunger in the place where thou livest, when thou hast it in thy power and thou dost not relieve them.

Hence it is that the uncharitable Priest and Levite are so justly condemned in the Gospel for passing by and taking no notice of the poor man that lay on the road of Jericho, weltering in his gore, and half dead of the wounds he had received from a set of robbers. Hence it is also that the rich man mentioned in St. Luke, xvi. was condemned to eternal misery for refusing the crumbs that fell from his table to poor Lazarus, who sat at his gate, covered with ulcers and famishing with hunger. The rich man was clothed in purple and silk, as the sacred text tells us ; he feasted sumptuously every day, and when he died he

was buried in hell, and plunged into devouring flames, where all the treasures he had formerly possessed on earth were insufficient to purchase a single drop of cold water for him to cool his burning tongue, or mitigate in the least degree the excruciating torments to which he was sentenced by a just judgment of God, because in his lifetime he had been insensible to the cries of the poor, and had misapplied in all kind of vanity and dissipation what he ought to have laid out in doing works of mercy. His misfortune should serve as a lesson and a warning to those unfeeling and hard-hearted mortals who resist all the tender sentiments that nature, humility, and religion inspire, and who, far from alleviating the sufferings of their fellow-creatures by works of mercy, let them pine away at their doors in the neighboring cellars and garrets for want of necessary food and raiment. They will stop at no expense to gratify their own favorite passions and to indulge their appetite in unnecessary delicacies ; but refuse to afford the least comfort or relief to a distressed neighbor, perishing on a bed of sorrow, under the anguish of an ulcerous and disordered body, shielded only against the inclemency of the weather by the scanty covering of a tattered garment. They can find money enough to spend in gaming and drinking, in play-houses and idle company, in high living, fine clothes, and expensive diversions ; but, if you take their own word for it, they have nothing to spare for charitable purposes and works of mercy to the poor.

O, let me entreat Christians of this description, if any such happen to be here present, to remember that the day will come when they shall be called to a strict account of their stewardship, and that the measure of their alms now to the poor shall then be the measure of God's mercy to them. *Judgment without mercy to him that hath not done mercy*, says St. James, ii. 13. The tears of disconsolate widows, the cries of helpless orphans, the sighs and lamentations of numbers of piteous objects, will then rise up against the uncharitable, and draw down the divine vengeance on their criminal heads. In vain shall they cry out then for mercy ; for, as the Holy Ghost says (Proverbs, xxi. 13), *He that stoppeth his ear against the cry of the poor, shall also cry himself, and shall not be heard*. The Sovereign Judge will then shut the bowels of infinite mercy against the unmerciful ; he will be deaf to their entreaties and turn away his face from them, as they now turn away their faces from the poor, and shut their ears against their moving petitions. He will then pass sentence of reprobation on them, because they have neglected to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, in short, because they have

refused to assist him in the persons of his poor brethren and distressed members here on earth, as appears from St. Matt. xxv. 41, where we read, that the Saviour of the world looks upon what is done or refused to the poor, as done or refused to Himself in person, and that the sentence of eternal happiness, or eternal misery, shall be pronounced on the last day, according as we have or have not performed deeds of charity and works of mercy. Before I proceed, permit me to address a few words of comfort and instruction to the suffering and distressed poor, who, like Lazarus, labor under the difficulties of life. As the unhappy fate of the rich glutton should alarm the great ones of the world, who enjoy all the comforts of this life, so, on the other hand, the happy end of poor Lazarus, who when he died was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom, is sufficient to afford consolation to you, my poor brethren, and should animate you to endure with patience and resignation, all the trials and hardships to which your humble station subjects you. You should guard against murmuring and repining at your condition, during the short term you are to remain in this place of pilgrimage and vale of tears. Your Divine Redeemer has consecrated your state of poverty by His own example, and He expressly says in the Gospel, *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven*. He will in His own good time dry up your tears and change your sorrow into inexpressible joy. If you do but keep-up to the rules of a Christian life, and refrain from the vices of filching and stealing, cursing and swearing, to which the lower orders of people are peculiarly addicted, the God of mercy will one day translate your souls, as He did poor Lazarus's, to the sacred mansions of everlasting bliss. In the interim you may rest assured, that the condition of the rich is not so much to be envied as some may, perhaps, imagine ; it is attended with so many dangers, difficulties, temptations, and weighty obligations, that the Gospel declares it to be easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of Heaven. Let us now briefly consider the great utility and signal advantages of alms-deeds. It is what I promised to show you in the second point.

As it is the indispensable duty, so it is the great interest of the rich and affluent to be charitable and merciful to the poor and distressed. They are the greatest gainers thereby themselves ; they receive more than they give ; of a duty they make a merit ; and by paying a debt they accumulate a treasure, which moths cannot destroy and which thieves are not able to steal away. Hence the Scripture says (Prov.

xiv.): *He that showeth mercy to the poor shall be blessed.* And again (chap. xix.): *He that hath mercy on the poor lendeth to the Lord, and he will repay him.* It is a little capital, put out at the highest interest, to bring in a profit that vastly surpasses the principal. It is a small grain of seed that is sown in fertile soil, and produces hundred-fold fruit; for such is the bounty of the Lord, that, as St. Augustine observes, He never suffers Himself to be outdone by us in acts of liberality, but, holding himself indebted to us for the smallest act of charity we do for his sake, though it should be as trifling as the widow's mite, or of no more value in itself than a cup of cold water, he requites it with a most ample reward. Give to the poor, says our Blessed Saviour (Matt. xix. 21), *and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.* The salutary effects of alms-giving appear visibly in the charitable Dorcas, mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, c. xix., who, on account of her having clothed some poor widows, deserved to be miraculously raised to life by St. Peter the Apostle; and in Cornelius, the centurion, who was favored with the apparition of an angel, and enlightened with the gift of faith, and mercifully called by a special grace to the pale of the true Church, because the alms given by him to the poor had ascended to heaven like a sweet incense in the sight of the Lord. The example of the widow of Sarephta, who shared her measure of oil and pot of meal with the Prophet Elias in his distress, and who was, therefore, not only blessed with plenty of provisions for herself and her family, but also had the comfort to see her dead child restored to life, shows plainly that alms-deeds draw down temporal as well as spiritual blessings on the charitable donors in this life, and cause their worldly substance to increase and multiply. They are very effectual means to avert the wrath of Heaven, to disarm the justice of God, and to expiate and redeem sins, as the Prophet Daniel told Nabuchodonosor, and as our Blessed Saviour Himself gave the Pharisees to understand in St. Luke xi. They contributed wonderfully to move the God of mercy to hear the prayers to which otherwise He would be deaf; to accept the sacrifices, which otherwise he would despise; to be mollified by the tears, which otherwise he would reject; and to grant the grace of a true conversion to sinners, and the precious gift of final perseverance to the just; so that in whatever state a person may happen to be, whether in the happy state of grace or in the dismal state of mortal sin, if he be merciful to the poor he will find his own great advantage in it, and may confidently hope that he will one day obtain mercy from the Lord, according to these

words of the Gospel : *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.* Water does not so easily wash away the spots off our clothes, says St. John Chrysostom, as alms wash off the spots of our souls, and blot out the stains of our sins. They extinguish sin as water extinguishes fire, says the Holy Scripture. *They deliver from death, purge away sin, and make a man find mercy and eternal life.* In fine, alms-deeds are more beneficial to the charitable giver than to the distressed receiver, which made the eloquent St. Cyprian formerly say to some poor objects, who returned him thanks for the alms he had given them, that it was rather incumbent on him to thank them for having exposed their wants, and afforded him a favorable opportunity to sow a few grains of seed, from which he hoped to reap an abundant harvest and to derive the most signal advantages. All other riches which men accumulate on earth will quit them at the hour of death and devolve to others, who perhaps will soon forget them ; but the alms which they hide in the bosom of the poor will precede, accompany, and follow them to the other world, and stand their best friends at the bar of Divine Justice. *Blessed, therefore, is the man who considers the necessities of the poor, and relieves them ; the Lord will treat him mildly and sweetly in the evil day,* as the Royal Prophet speaks, Ps. xl. For this reason our Saviour cautions us in the Gospel not to set our hearts and affections on the perishable goods of this world, but to make for ourselves friends of the mammon of iniquity ; that is, to gain over the poor on our side by plentiful alms, that when all other things fail us, the alms we have distributed may plead our cause on the day of need, and the poor objects we have relieved may intercede for us like so many powerful advocates before the throne of God, and may procure us admittance into the eternal tabernacles of glory. Since, then, my brethren, works of mercy and deeds of charity are so acceptable and so meritorious in the sight of God ; since they are productive of so many salutary effects and signal advantages, both to our spiritual and temporal concerns ; since they are so strongly inculcated by the voice of nature, the feelings of humanity, and the dictates of religion, it is hoped that you will come forward with alacrity, and contribute according to your abilities to the support of the laudable charity of this day. *If you have much, give abundance,* says Tobias ; *if a little, take care to bestow willingly a little.* And that you may partake of the blessed effects of your alms, give cheerfully with a willing heart and a pleasant countenance ; since, as St. Paul says (2 Cor., ix.), *God loveth a cheerful giver.* Give as to

God, and not as to man ; give with a pure intention for God's sake, to relieve Jesus Christ in the person of His little ones. Let the chief object of your compassion be your own immortal souls ; for, as St. Augustine remarks, Christ requires from you, in the first place, the soul which He redeemed with His sacred blood : *Hoc requirit, quod redemit*. To make Him an offering of your external goods, and to refuse Him your souls, is to imitate unhappy Cain, who presented the worst of his flock, and reserved the best for himself. Christian charity embraces all mankind, and tenders its good offices to every one in real distress, notwithstanding the difference of his religion, country, or profession, as our Divine Master teaches us in the parable of the merciful Samaritan. It does not exclude any real object from the acts of its universal benevolence. Prudence and discretion are, indeed, to be used in the choice of proper objects ; but, as St. John Chrysostom observes, too anxious an inquiry, and an overgreat suspicion of imposture, are to be avoided as being contrary to Christian simplicity and fraternal charity.

The poor little children, whose cause I wish to plead with some degree of success, look up to you now with confidence. They claim a right to your protection, and deserve your particular attention ; they are unquestionably real and proper objects, as they are either fatherless, motherless, friendless, or helpless ; they have neither the will nor the power to misapply or abuse your charitable donations, which are expended by their trustees with the strictest economy for their sole use and real benefit. Since the first establishment of this charity a great number of poor reduced room-keepers' children have been essentially relieved these several years past, both in their corporal and spiritual necessities. They have been rescued from the jaws of destruction, preserved from the corruption of the streets, instructed in their moral duties, educated in the fear and love of God, trained up to habits of virtue, and apprenticed to proper trades, which now afford them a comfortable support, without being a burden to the public. The flock of children who are your humble petitioners this day expect by your charitable aid to partake of the like advantages, and to be enabled to become in process of time useful, industrious, and edifying members of society. They have no other resource at present but your benevolence. They stand in need of a continuance of your annual contributions, in order to defray the heavy expenses that are incurred by providing them with clothing and other necessities.

You cannot be insensible, my brethren, of the great advantages of

giving children a Christian education, and impressing their tender minds with good principles, and an early tincture of piety and religion ; the honor and glory of God are thereby promoted, the loss and ruin of numberless souls are prevented, and the dreadful evils that usually spring from ignorance and idleness are in a great measure obviated and remedied ; nay, whether we consider it in a religious or in a civil point of view, it is a matter of great importance to form youths to habits of virtue and honest industry, and to diffuse a spirit of religion among the lower ranks of people at an early period of life. This is a truth so obvious, that in every civilized nation the education of youth is looked upon as an object of the first magnitude, as it is one of the most effectual means, not only to stem the torrent of iniquity and to reform the depraved morals of the age, but likewise to preserve peace and order in civil society and to advance the welfare and the happiness of the community at large. May I not then conclude, my brethren, that nothing deserves more encouragement, nothing is more worthy of your patronage and protection, than those charitable societies and institutions which the piety of the faithful has established for the purpose of giving a Christian education to poor, helpless, destitute children, and providing them with necessary clothing, and proper trades which are to be their future support. The example of our separated brethren of every religious denomination, who on similar occasions seem to be actuated with uncommon zeal, should excite in you a holy emulation to exercise your humanity, and testify your charity to the little ones assembled here this day. Let me entreat you to open your eyes and see their wants, to open your ears and hearken to their petitions, to open your hearts and compassionate them, to open your hands and purses, and extend your charity toward their support and education. Remember, that by clothing and aiding them in their respective necessities, you clothe and aid Jesus Christ, who says in the Gospel, that whatever you do to His little ones, He will consider it as done to Himself in person. I shall, therefore, conclude with the advice of St. Augustine : Give some share of your worldly substance to Jesus Christ, to whom you owe all you have and possess ; reckon Him among your children ; count one more in your family ; reserve a child's portion for Him ; clothe, feed, and relieve Him this day in the persons of His poor little innocent members ; and in return they will be bound to raise their hearts and voices to Heaven in your behalf, and supplicate the Giver of all good gifts to shower down the treasures of His grace and mercy on all their benefactors in

this life, and to grant that on the last day they may be ranked in the thrice happy number of those who are to be invited by Jesus Christ to the inheritance of His heavenly kingdom, with these comforting words, *Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world—Matt. xxv. 34.* Which is the blessing I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

SUNDAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF CORPUS CHRISTI, AND THE SECOND AFTER PENTECOST.

ON THE TRANSCENDENT DIGNITY AND EXCELLENCE OF THE SACRAMENT OF THE EUCHARIST, AND THE VENERATION DUE TO IT.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. The banquet of Assuerus and the Lord's Supper.
- II. The dignity and excellence of the Blessed Eucharist.
- III. It is worthy of respect, veneration, and worship.
- IV. A profession of faith in the Real Presence.

Homo quidam fecit cœnam magnam, et vocavit multos.—St. Luc. c. xiv. v. 16.
A certain man made a great supper, and invited many to it.—St. Luke, c. xiv. v. 16.

It is related in the first chapter of the Book of Esther, that Assuerus, King of Persia, being desirous to display his power and grandeur, made a most sumptuous and elegant feast, to which he invited the nobility and gentry of his kingdom for the space of one hundred and eighty days successively. Nothing that could be purchased or acquired, though ever so costly or exquisite, was deficient, but every thing abounded that could contribute to aggrandize this royal banquet; however, it was but a shadow of the delicious and heavenly banquet alluded to in the words of my text, and called by St. Paul the *Lord's Supper*, because it was instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ at His Last Supper, or the last time He eat the legal supper of the Paschal Lamb with His Disciples in the city of Jerusalem. The supper which our Lord provided then is the blessed sacrament of the Eucharist, a supper fitter for angels than for men, and suitable in every respect to His infinite goodness and boundless

liberality. It may truly and justly be called a *Great Supper*, not only on account of the incomparable grandeur of Him who instituted and prepared it, and the numberless multitude of guests who are invited to partake of it, but also for the intrinsic value of the food that is offered thereat. The food which we are here presented with is not terrene or corruptible, but divine and incorruptible, and instituted for the nourishment of the spiritual life of our souls. We all partake of it, and still it is not diminished ; we all eat of it, and still it remains whole and entire. One eats of it, and a thousand eat of it, and this one receives Christ entire, and a thousand do no more. This banquet is to continue, not for half a year only, like that of King Assuerus, but every day unto the consummation of ages and the end of the world. There is no set number of guests invited to it ; all mankind in general are welcome to the table of Jesus, provided they come clothed with the nuptial garment. The poor have as free access as the rich ; the feeble, the blind, the lame, have the honor to be invited ; nay, not only to be invited, but even to be pressed and importuned to come, under pain of incurring His displeasure, and of being liable to be treated like the guests mentioned in the Gospel, who were excluded from the banquet of eternal glory, because they refused to accept of the affectionate invitation which had been given them.

The Blessed *Eucharist* is so called from a Greek word that signifies *thanksgiving*, because at its first institution Christ rendered thanks to His Heavenly Father, and because it is to be received by us with thanksgiving, and is daily offered to God in thanksgiving for all His gracious favors and blessings, it being both a sacrament and a sacrifice, as it is not only *given to us*, but likewise *given and offered for us*. It is a sacrament in the Holy Communion and a sacrifice in the Mass, and in both respects it surpasses, by many degrees, all the sacraments and sacrifices of the Old Testament, which have therefore been abolished in order to make way for it. In memory of, and in thanksgiving for so valuable a treasure, and so signal a favor, the Church has instituted the grand festival and solemn octave of Corpus Christi, during which she calls on all her children, all over the world, to honor Jesus Christ in the Blessed Eucharist, with a kind of triumph, and to praise and magnify Him for the love and mercy He has been pleased to testify in the institution of this most holy sacrament and sacrifice of the New Law. To inspire you with the like pious sentiments, I will, in the first place, endeavor to lay before you the transcendent dignity and excellency of

this sacrament of the Eucharist ; and in the second place, I will show you that it is most worthy of your profound respect and veneration. Let us previously implore the divine assistance, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, greeting Her for this end with the words of the Angel: *Ave Maria*.

As the sun is the most noble of the seven planets, and gold the most precious of all metals, the Blessed Eucharist is the most holy of the seven sacraments of the New Law, and surpasses all the sacraments, figures and types of the Old Law, by as many degrees as Jesus Christ Himself, in person and dignity, excels all the victims and oblations that were formerly immolated and offered by the people of God. It was prefigured by the tree of life that was planted in the middle of the earthly Paradise ; it was prefigured by the bread and wine that were offered in sacrifice by the High Priest Melchisedech, and by the bread that the Prophet Elias was nourished with in the wilderness, and by the holy loaves of proposition that were placed on a table before the inward sanctuary in the Jewish Temple ; it was prefigured by the manna from Heaven, with which the children of Israel were fed in the desert ; by the Paschal Lamb of the Jews ; by the blood of the testament, with which Moses sprinkled the people, and by the peace-offerings and other ancient sacrifices of the Mosaic Law. These were only types and figures of the Blessed Eucharist, and consequently they were as inferior to it in dignity, as the image or picture of a king is inferior to the king himself in person. This made St. Paul call all the ancient types and figures *weak and beggarly elements, and mere shadows of the good things to come*, or that were to be given to the children of grace, under the New Law of the Gospel—Heb. x. Gal. iv. The very nature of the things shows that the figure must necessarily be inferior to the thing prefigured, and that the shadow and type must be inferior to the substance and reality. Hence the Old Law was annulled by *reason of the weakness and unprofitableness thereof*—Heb. vii. 18. Hence it is, also, that the Blessed Eucharist has justly taken place of the ancient figures : no sooner was it instituted, but they were abolished. They vanished and disappeared, as the stars disappear at the approach of the sun, and as the darkness of the night vanishes away when the light begins to shine.

This alone is sufficient to prove the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist ; for if there was nothing more in it than a figure of His body and blood, or bread and wine taken in remembrance of Him, the figures

of the Old Law would not only equal, but even excel this great sacrament of the New Law, and be many degrees superior to it. It is evident that the Paschal Lamb, for instance, was a far more noble type of Christ, and represented Him much better than a bit of bread. The blood of victims, solemnly offered to God, was also a more excellent figure of His sacred blood than the juice of the grape, and the miraculous manna, which the Scripture calls the *bread of angels*, was far beyond the bread of man. Yet Christ our Lord promised in St. John, vi. to give us in the Eucharist something better, something more noble, more excellent, more sacred, more heavenly, and more divine than the manna from Heaven, the Paschal Lamb, the blood of the Testament, or than the other ancient types and figures, and consequently than common bread and wine ; He promised to present us with the substance and truth instead of types and shadows ; He promised to feed our souls with *a wonderful life-giving food from Heaven, that would bring eternal life, and make us abide in Him, and Him in us* ; He promised, in fine, to grant us some special and signal favor, which had not been granted to the Jews ; for He said : *The bread which I will give you is my flesh, for the life of the world ; not as your fathers did eat manna in the desert, and died : He that eateth this bread shall live for ever.* It was on the very eve of His passion and death, the *very night that He was betrayed* by Judas, as St. Paul tells us, that He actually fulfilled His promise, and perfected His last will and testament. He feasted the souls of His Disciples with the divine and heavenly banquet of His own body and blood in the blessed sacrament of the Eucharist, which He then instituted ; and that this inestimable legacy of His love might continue in His Church to the end of the world, He at the same time ordained them priests of the New Law, empowering them, and their lawful successors in the ministry, to do what He Himself then did, that is, to consecrate bread and wine into His body and blood, for a perpetual commemoration of His death. St. Paul, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, xi., assures us, that he learned this mystery by a special revelation from Jesus Christ. The account he gives there of the last supper, is similar to that which is given by St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke, and affords us another strong proof of the real presence of Christ in the blessed sacrament of the Eucharist ; for in x. 16 of said epistle, the Apostle calls it, in express terms, *the communion of the body and blood of Christ*, which was *delivered, broken, or sacrificed* for us on the Cross ; and in xi. 27, 29, he says, *that whosoever shall eat the bread or*

drink the chalice of the Lord unworthily, is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, and he that eateth and drinketh unworthily eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the body of our Lord, which clearly proves that the body and blood of the Lord must be really present in the sacrament; for if what the unworthy receiver takes was no more than bread and wine, or a figure of the Lord, he would not be *guilty of the body and blood of the Lord*; nor could he be blamed for *not discerning the body of the Lord*, but only for not discerning a figure of it; nor could he be said to *eat and drink damnation to himself*. How could a Christian *discern it*, if it be not there really present? How could he be *guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, or eat and drink damnation to himself*, if he does not receive the body and blood of the Lord, or if what he receives be nothing but bread and wine, or only an empty figure or sign of Christ. The heavenly manna and the Paschal Lamb were more lively figures of Christ than a morsel of bread, and yet those who eat them, in the state of sin, could not be said to be *guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, or to eat and drink their own damnation*. As to the words, *Do this in commemoration of me*, which the Apostle quotes in the aforesaid epistle to the Corinthians, he informs us (v. 26), that what we are thereby commanded to remember, as often as we receive the body of Christ, is the death of Christ, which being a thing not only present, but really past, is a most proper subject for our devout and grateful remembrance. Even such things as are not visibly present, or that we are liable to forget, may be the object of our remembrance, whether they be really present or really absent. Thus we are commanded in the Scripture to *remember God* (Deuter. viii. Eccles. xii.), though *in Him we live, move, and have our being*. The *remembrance*, therefore, of Christ, and of His death, which is enjoined in the aforesaid words, is by no means opposite to His real presence in the sacrament. But does not St. Paul call it *bread*? He does, and so does Christ Himself; but they both inform us what this *bread* is. Christ assures us that it is *the very flesh which He gave for the life of the world* (John, vi. 52), and which *was given and delivered for us*—Luke xxii. And St. Paul tells us, that it is the *Communion of the body of Christ*—1 Cor. x. 16. It is called *bread*, because it is a supernatural, divine, and spiritual bread of life, that feeds and nourishes the soul as natural and material bread nourishes the body; for which reason Christ our Lord says (John, vi. 54): *Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you shall not have life*

in you. It is also called *bread*, because, before the consecration it is bread, and it still retains the outward appearance of bread even after the consecration, when the inward substance both of the bread and wine is changed into the substance of Christ's real body and blood, by the same almighty power that changed the substance of water into the substance of wine at the wedding of Cana—St. John, ii. To ask *how this can be*, is a question like unto that of the incredulous Jews of Capharnaum, and is more becoming an infidel than a Christian who believes in a God, to whom nothing is impossible. Surely the power of the Son of God cannot be denied by anyone who professes the Christian religion. He is undoubtedly able to take any form or appearance He thinks proper, and to render His body visible or invisible as He pleases ; He can make it penetrate doors and stone walls, and be present, one and the same, in many different places at once, without being exposed to the external senses, or being obnoxious to corporal contingencies, any more than His blessed soul. He can render Himself truly and really present with His whole and entire body, under the smallest consecrated host, in the same circumscription and dimensions that the bread and wine were before the consecration ; for as His body is now immortal and impassible, it partakes in some measure of the properties and qualities of a spirit, and may, in the words of St. Paul, be called a spiritualized or *spiritual body*—1 Cor. xv. 44. As a spirit, therefore, has no dependence on place, and is neither confined by it nor to it, and as it really exists without requiring external extension for its existence, so in like manner, the body of Christ really and truly exists in the blessed Eucharist, and retains there all that is essential to a body, but does not require actual or external extension of parts, this being only accidental to a body. Moreover, as a spirit is not obnoxious to corporal contingencies, or liable to be hurt, divided or corrupted, so likewise the body of Christ is not liable to be hurt, or to suffer any alteration in this sacrament. It is only the accident or sacramental species, under which it is here veiled, that are subject to such changes, and may be broken, divided and consumed. These only we see with our corporal eyes and touch with our hands, but we neither behold the divinity nor the humanity of Christ, though here really present ; for it is not the eye of the flesh, but the eye of faith, that pierces through the clouds with which He is here encompassed, and that beholds with wonder the dazzling rays and splendor of His infinite majesty, hidden and veiled under the poor elements and humble appearances of bread and wine. However, it is not to be

inferred from this, that the evidence or testimony of the senses militates against this mystery, or that they are deceived in their proper object, since the senses are affected in the same manner, and receive the same impressions, after the consecration as before it. They behold and discern the same outward appearances and qualities ; they truly perceive, represent and bear witness of the accident, which are their proper and immediate object ; as to the inward substance, it is not the proper and immediate object of the senses, but the object of the understanding and judgment which is deceived when it too hastily concludes, on account of the outward appearances, that a thing is in effect what it appears to be. Regularly speaking, indeed, we may be directed by our senses, when neither reason nor divine authority obliges us to judge otherwise. But if reason or divine authority interposes and assures us of the contrary, we are to form a different judgment. We are to be guided by God's Word, which makes things infinitely surer than any direction our judgment may receive from the testimony of our senses, which, as we know by experience, are often apt to lead us astray. Thus, when at Christ's resurrection and ascension, the angels appeared under the outward form of young men, clothed in white garments, and when the Holy Ghost appeared in the shape of a dove and of fiery tongues, the faithful who beheld them were not to rely on the testimony of their senses, nor to conclude that these things really were what they appeared to be, because the authority of God's Word intervened, and assured them that what appeared to be a dove, fiery tongues and young men, was not really so, but was the Holy Ghost and angels, under these outward appearances. The only sense we may safely trust in regard of the judgment we are to form concerning the inward part of the blessed sacrament, is the sense of hearing, which assures us by the Word of God, and by the authority of God's Church, which, according to the Apostle (1 Tim. iii. 15), *is the pillar and the ground of the truth*, and consequently, not liable to error, that what appears to our senses to be bread and wine, is truly and really the body and blood of Christ. There is no greater difficulty in believing this, notwithstanding any thing our senses may suggest to the contrary, than there is in believing the dove and fiery tongues to have been the Holy Ghost, and the young men to have been angels, although to the senses they appeared to be quite another thing.

Now, as to the respect and veneration due to the blessed sacrament of the Eucharist, it follows necessarily from what has been hitherto said and proved, that it is to be worshiped with divine honor and adoration,

as it contains truly and really the divine person of Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, who is certainly most worthy to be honored and adored wheresoever He is. Let unbelievers misrepresent it as they please, there is no more danger of idolatry to be apprehended in worshipping and adoring Him in the sacrament than there is in worshipping and adoring him in heaven. It is not to the outward sacramental signs under which He is veiled that this honor is paid ; but our adoration is evidently directed to the Divinity itself, and immediately paid to Jesus Christ, who is no idol or imaginary God, but the true and living God. He is the object of our adoration ; and, indeed, the more He has humbled Himself here for our sake the more we are indebted to Him for His love, the more zealous we should be in testifying our gratitude and veneration for Him, and the more assiduous in uniting ourselves to Him by devout and fervent communion. Such are the pious sentiments which the Church, ever guided by the Holy Ghost, wishes to excite in her children all over the world during this solemn octave. She apprises them in the words of the angels, mentioned in the second chapter of the Apocalypse, that *the Lamb that was slain is worthy to receive honor, glory, and benediction*. She exposes the divine sacrament to their view in a remonstrance, placed in the tabernacle, that they may come and throw themselves at the feet of Jesus, like Mary Magdalen, and pour out their hearts in fervent prayers before the altar, as Anne, the mother of Samuel, did before the Ark of the Covenant. She invites them to approach the delicious banquet and Great Supper of her beloved Spouse with the necessary dispositions, that their souls may be replenished with grace and enriched with celestial blessings. In fine, she calls on them in those words of the Royal Prophet (Ps. xciv.), *To come, adore, and prostrate themselves* before Jesus Christ, *because he is the Lord our God*. This is what the three kings or wise men of the East did, when they found Him in the stable of Bethlehem, lying on a heap of straw in a manger, between two beasts, without any outward appearance of divinity, ensigns of royalty, or marks of grandeur. Far from being scandalized on beholding Him in so poor, mean, and despicable a condition ; far from listening to the suggestions of pride, or the reasonings of human wisdom ; far from relying on the testimony of their senses, which exhibited nothing to their view but a poor, forlorn, distressed infant, they prostrated themselves before Him with a lively faith, they adored Him as their God, and in acknowledgment of His divinity, royalty, and humanity,

they presented Him with three mystical gifts, of frankincense, gold, and myrrh. Their conduct is a lesson for us. We should learn from it not to be guided by the testimony of our fallible senses in matters beyond their reach, nor to conclude rashly, in direct opposition to divine revelation, that a thing is always in reality what it appears to be. Far from staggering in our faith, or disbelieving the real presence of Christ in the Blessed Eucharist, because we do not see any visible appearances or distinctive marks of infinite majesty and grandeur about Him ; far from being incredulous, like Thomas, because we do not feel the print of the nails and the scars of the wounds in His sacred body, we should approach Him, like the wise men of the East, with a lively faith, and offer Him the gold of an ardent charity, the incense of fervent and devout prayer, and the myrrh of a mortified and penitential life. We should submit our reason to His infallible word, and believe upon His divine authority what we neither see nor comprehend, that we may be entitled to the blessed reward that He has promised in the Gospel to those who believe and do not see. *Because thou hast seen me*, said he to Thomas the Apostle, *thou hast believed. Blessed are they that have not seen, and have believed*—St. John xx. 29.

O Divine Jesus, we therefore firmly believe that thou art really present in the blessed sacrament of the Eucharist ; we believe that it contains Thy sacred body and blood, accompanied with Thy soul and divinity ; we acknowledge these great truths ; we believe these wonders ; we adore the power that has wrought them ; the same power that said : *Let there be light, and light was made*. We submit our senses and reason to Thy divine authority ; we praise and glorify Thy infinite goodness, which hast prepared this *Great Supper* for the nourishment of our souls during the course of our mortal pilgrimage here on earth. Thy holy Prophet David had just reason to cry out with ecstasy : *Our merciful and gracious Lord hath made a memorial of his wonderful works, and hath given food to them that fear him*. Blessed be Thy name forever. Accept our homage, O Lord, accept our most hearty thanks, and give us grace to receive this sacrament of Thy love with such reverence and humility, such purity and faith, such contrition and devotion, as may be for Thy honor and our own salvation, and prepare us for that eternal banquet of glory which is reserved for Thy elect in the kingdom of Heaven. And which I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen*.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON THE HOLY SACRIFICE OF THE MASS.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. The Mass an epitome of the sacrifices of the Old Law.
- II. The Mass is a true sacrifice.
- III. Its antiquity, holiness, and grandeur.
- IV. The obligation and manner of hearing Mass.

Christus dilexit nos, et tradidit semetipsum pro nobis hostiam, et sacrificium Deo in odorem suaviatis.—Ephes. c. v. v. 2.

Christ loved us, and delivered himself for us, an oblation and a sacrifice to God, for an odor of sweetness.—Ephes. c. v. v. 2.

To offer sacrifice to the Supreme Being in acknowledgment of His sovereign dominion over all creatures has, since the beginning of the world, been always considered as a necessary duty of man, and an essential part of true religion; and the Almighty has vouchsafed to accept of oblations of this kind as an agreeable worship, when they were accompanied with the inward sacrifice of the heart, and with faith in the promised Redeemer, who was to come in the plenitude of time. Hence Abel, Enos, Noe, Melchisedech, Abraham, Job, and other holy patriarchs and servants of God, who lived under the law of nature, thought it their duty to raise altars to the honor of the Deity, and to sacrifice whatever they deemed fittest to express the humble sentiments and inward dispositions of their souls, and to testify the supreme homage which they owed the Divine Majesty. In the law of Moses, when the Lord Himself was pleased to reveal to His chosen people the particular manner in which He was willing to be honored and worshiped by them, He instituted a great variety of sacrifices, some of which were called *Holocausts*, or *Whole Burnt Offerings*; some *Propitiary*, or *Sin Offerings*; others *Thanksgiving Offerings*; others *Pacific*, or *Peace Offerings*. But these sacrifices had no intrinsic virtue or efficacy in themselves, and were only acceptable to God in view of the great sacrifice of the New Law which they prefigured. For this reason St. Paul calls them weak and beggarly elements, types and empty shadows of the good things that were to come. Christ, our Divine Redeemer, by one offering on the cross accomplished them all, and comprehended them all

in the unity of His sacrifice, which is at the same time a Holocaust, a sacrifice of Propitiation, a sacrifice of Thanksgiving, and a sacrifice of Impetration, and by which He paid the full price of our redemption, canceled the handwriting of death that stood in full force against us, and perfected forever them that are sanctified, as the Apostles speak. All other means of sanctification and salvation derive their force and efficacy from this great service which He offered on the cross ; and it was to renew the memory of it, and to apply the fruits and merits of it to our souls, that He instituted the Eucharist and commemorative sacrifice of the Mass, which He continues to offer daily on our altars by the ministry of the priests of His Church ; for His love for mankind was not contented with offering Himself once upon the cross a bleeding victim for our sins, but He was willing also to leave His Church a continual sacrifice worthy of Himself, that the same precious blood which He shed for our sake on Mount Calvary might continue to the end of the world to cry aloud to Heaven from our altars for mercy and pardon in our behalf. With reason, therefore, the Apostle says : *Christ loved us, and delivered himself for us, an oblation and sacrifice to God for an odor of sweetness.* In the sacrifice of the Cross He offered Himself in a bloody manner ; in the sacrifice of the Mass He offers Himself in an unbloody manner ; so that the sacrifice of the Mass is not a distinct sacrifice from the sacrifice of the Cross, but one and the self-same in substance, differing only in the manner of offering. In short, the Mass is a true and proper sacrifice, than which nothing is more ancient, nothing is more holy, nothing is more august in the Christian religion, and consequently it is necessary to be present thereat with great reverence, attention, and devotion. Behold the whole plan of the following discourse, and the subject of your favorable attention. Let us previously implore the divine assistance, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, &c. *Ave Maria.*

Although a contrite and humble heart, fasting, prayer, alms-deeds, and every good work that is done to honor God may be called a sacrifice in a metaphorical sense, as St. Augustine observes (1, 10 de Civ. c. 6), yet, strictly and properly speaking, sacrifice is an external act of religion, or an outward offering of some visible or sensible thing made to God by a lawful priest, to acknowledge the supreme dominion of God over all creatures, and to render Him the homage that is due to His Sovereign Majesty. The same holy doctor remarks that all nations, however barbarous and savage, that ever acknowledged the existence

of a Supreme Being, and all religions, whether true or false, have always looked upon sacrifice as the special prerogative of the Divinity, and the principal means to testify the total subjection and dependence of man, and the supreme worship he owes to God. St. Jerome also says, there never was a religion without a sacrifice, nor a church without priests, nor priests without altars, nor altars without a victim or oblation—religion, sacrifice, and priesthood being so closely united that the principal functions of priests, and the most solemn act of religion, is to offer sacrifice to the Deity in some form or other. Can it then be supposed that Christ would leave His Church in the New Law without an essential part of religion, and destitute of the principal means of honoring God? Can it be imagined that He would abandon her, like the Jewish synagogue, which is without a priest, without a sacrifice, without an altar? No, my brethren. We have an altar, says the Apostle (Heb. xiii. 10), and consequently we have a sacrifice. We have the eucharistic and commemorative sacrifice of the Mass, which Christ instituted at His Last Supper, and which the Scripture mentions, Acts xiii. 2, where we read in the Greek original: *As they were sacrificing to the Lord, and fasting, &c.* The acts of the martyrdom of St. Andrew the Apostle, which Natalis Alexander and other learned writers maintain to be genuine, though contested by some, make mention of this sacrifice in the following words, which the Apostle said to his persecutors: *I offer every day on the altar to the Almighty God an immaculate Lamb, whose flesh indeed is eaten, but the Lamb remains whole and entire.* St. Justin, St. Irenæus, Tertullian, St. Cyril of Alexandria, and other doctors of the primitive Church, assert in express terms that the Apostles learned from Christ to offer this sacrifice throughout the earth. St. Augustine, who flourished upward of fourteen hundred years ago, assures us (*l. 16, de Civ.*, and *in Ps. 109*), that this sacrifice was then celebrated in the Church all over the Christian world. He informs us also (*Lib. 9, Conf.*) that his mother Monica, at her dying hour, entreated him to offer it up at the altar of God for the happy repose of her soul, from a persuasion that the souls of the faithful departed are relieved by this sacrifice of our Mediator, as he speaks in *Enchyr. c. 110, l de Cur. Mort.* It was expedient and just that there should be such a sacrifice in the Christian Church, in order to join all the faithful together in the external duties of religion, to pay unto God the homage that is due to Him, to give Him thanks for all His blessings, to implore the forgiveness of our sins, and to obtain such favors and graces as we daily stand in need of. Pre-

figurative sacrifices were required in the Law of Nature, and in the written Law of Moses, to represent the sacrifice of the Cross, and to prefigure the death of Christ, then to come. In like manner a commemorative sacrifice was required in the New Law, to be a standing memorial of the sacrifice of the Cross, and to represent the death of Christ, now already past. This commemorative sacrifice is no more derogatory or injurious to the infinite value and efficacy of the sacrifice of the Cross than the prefigurative sacrifices of the Old Law were. On the contrary, it honors it highly, as it serves to renew and perpetuate the memory of it to the end of the world, and to impart the benefit of it to our souls. Nay, it is the same in substance with the sacrifice of the Cross, because it is the same victim, Jesus Christ, that is sacrificed in both, and the same High Priest, Jesus Christ, who is the principal offerer in both. The only difference consists in this, that the sacrifice of the Cross was a bloody sacrifice, because Christ then actually shed His blood, and was really put to death ; but the commemorative sacrifice of the Mass is an unbloody sacrifice, wherein the death of Christ is only mystically represented, and shown forth on the altar by the separate consecration of the bread and wine, which denotes the real shedding of His blood, and the actual separation of His body and soul at His death.

Nothing is wanting here that is necessary to constitute a true and proper sacrifice ; neither victim, nor priest, nor altar, nor oblation, nor consummation. It is an outward oblation of the body and blood of Christ under the visible forms of bread and wine ; it is offered to God alone, and not to any creature in heaven or on earth ; it is offered for the four great ends of sacrifice ; it is offered for the whole Church in its three different states, that is, for the Church triumphant in heaven, in thanksgiving to God for the graces bestowed on the saints in this life, and for the happiness they now enjoy ; for the Church militant on earth, to draw down the blessings of heaven on the faithful, and for the Church suffering in Purgatory, to obtain relief from them in their sufferings, and a speedy admittance to eternal glory. The oblation is here made by a lawful priest, properly ordained, consecrated, and authorized to officiate in Christ's name, and as his vicegerent, He being the chief priest or principal offerer, as well as the victim that is offered ; for as it was Christ that offered Himself, and that was offered upon the cross, so in like manner it is Christ that offers Himself, and that is offered on the altar by the hands of the officiating priest, who acts under Him as

His visible substitute, and who, therefore, when he comes to the consecration, wherein this sacrifice essentially consists, speaks and acts, not in his own name, or by his own authority, but in the name and person of Christ, saying, *This is my body ; this is the chalice of my blood.* The oblation that is here made is also accompanied with a real change and destruction of the inward substance of the bread and wine, and with a real presenting of the body and blood of Christ, our victim, under appearances which denote His real death. On the cross He actually died, and really shed His precious blood for our sake, His body being then mortal and passible ; on the altar He can only admit of a mystical death and of a mystical effusion of blood, His body being now glorious, immortal, and impassible. He is here really exhibited to His Eternal Father under the two separate species, without any visible sign of life, motion, or action, and under the figure and appearance of death, as if He was really dead, according to what was shown to St. John in the Apocalypse, when he said, *I saw a Lamb standing, as it were, slain*, or under the appearance of being slain, which is sufficient to a true and proper sacrifice, it being evident, from several sacrifices of the Old Law, that a real immolation or total destruction of the thing offered in sacrifice to God was not always required. In holocausts, indeed, the victim was entirely consumed, to represent, in the most perfect manner, the supreme dominion of God over all creatures ; but in other kinds of sacrifices it was sufficient to make such a change in the host as it was susceptible of. The victim was commonly consumed in part only, and of the rest was made a spiritual banquet for the priests and the people. This represented the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Mass, wherein both the priest and the people are spiritually nourished with the heavenly banquet and communion of the body and blood of the adorable victim of the redemption, Jesus Christ, who, to denote the complete oblation He made of Himself, was like a pure holocaust, as it were, entirely consumed by death upon the cross for the glory of His Eternal Father. Thus, by offering Himself up in a bloody manner on the cross, He not only exercised and fulfilled the priestly order of Aaron, but He likewise exercised and fulfilled the priestly order of Melchisedech, by instituting and offering up the Eucharistic sacrifice on the very eve of His passion and death ; for it is evident, from the account given by the evangelists of the institution of the Blessed Eucharist, that Christ not only *gave it to his disciples* at His Last Supper, to be received by them as a sacrament and spiritual banquet in the

holy communion, but that He likewise *gave it for them*, and *offered it for them* and *for many*, as a propitiatory sacrifice *for the remission of sins*. And that this sacrifice might continue to be offered up in His Church unto the end of the world, He at the same time ordained His Apostles priests of the New Law, and empowered and commanded them and their lawful successors in the ministry to consecrate and offer up the Blessed Eucharist for a perpetual commemoration of His passion, and a grateful remembrance of His death, as appears from these words : *Do this in remembrance of me*, that is, as St. Paul explains it, to show for the death of the Lord till His second coming at the end of the world. Hence it is that the Scripture styles Him *our High Priest forever*, according to the order of *Melchisedech*, which He could not be truly and properly called, if he had not instituted a sacrifice similar to that of Melchisedech, which was to be offered to the end of the world by inferior priests, subordinate to his priesthood ; for as the order of Melchisedech's priesthood consisted principally in this, that he offered up bread and wine in sacrifice, Christ our Lord can only be styled our *High Priest forever*, according to the order of *Melchisedech*, on account of the outward resemblance between Melchisedech's sacrifice and the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Mass, which He instituted, and still continues to offer up by the ministry of the priests of His Church under the visible form of bread and wine.

This is the pure oblation of the New Law, which the Prophet Malachy foretold and pointed out in the strongest light in his first chapter, tenth and eleventh verses, where he tells us that the *Jewish sacrifices were to be rejected, and to be succeeded by a new sacrifice and a pure oblation, which would be offered up to God in every place among the Gentiles, from the rising of the sun to the setting*. Both the Greek and Latin Doctors have made use of this text, to prove that the Blessed Eucharist is not only a sacrament, but likewise a sacrifice wherein the body of Christ is representatively immolated, and His blood is mystically shed and separated from the body by virtue of the words of consecration, as by a spiritual sword. To pretend that this prophecy regards only the sacrifice of the Cross, is a manifest error, because the sacrifice of the Cross was only offered in one single place of Judea, on Mount Calvary, and the Prophet tells us that the sacrifice he speaks of shall be *offered in every place among the Gentiles, from the rising to the setting of the sun*. Neither can this prediction be understood of an inward or spiritual sacrifice, for besides that the

inward sacrifice of the heart, or the spiritual sacrifice of good works is not properly a sacrifice, it being often opposed to sacrifice, as when the Scripture says, *I will have mercy and not sacrifice*; and again, *Obedience is better than sacrifice*, it is evident that an inward or spiritual sacrifice is not a new sacrifice, nor to be substituted in the place of the ancient sacrifices, as it existed in all times since the beginning of the world; so that it cannot be of it that the Prophet speaks. It is clear, then, that his words can only be verified in the Eucharistic sacrifice of Christ's precious body and blood in the Mass, which is the only pure oblation of the New Law that is made to God in every place among the Gentiles, and that has been substituted by Christ in the place of the ancient sacrifices, which were but types and figures of His sacrifice. There are several other passages in the Old Testament which foretel that in the spiritual kingdom, or Church of Christ, the priesthood shall never fail to offer up a continual sacrifice, and that the converted nations shall worship God by sacrifices throughout the world, as long as the heavens and the earth shall stand. All these predictions clearly point out the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Mass, and give us to understand that it is to be offered up to God, for an odor of sweetness, till the end of the world, when it is to be abolished by the wicked Antichrist, and the abolition of it shall be an evident mark of the approaching destruction of the universe. As a further proof, I might quote here the most ancient liturgies of all nations and of all ages since the earliest years of Christianity, which make frequent mention of this sacrifice. I might produce the unanimous testimonies of the holy Fathers in every age, the authority of the general councils, and the most venerable monuments of antiquity, to show that the sacrifice of the Mass was always offered up in the Church of God all over the Christian world, before Martin Luther started up to oppose it; but it is sufficient at present to observe, that no time can be assigned in which the use of it first began, which is a certain proof, according to the rule laid down by St. Augustine, that it has been handed down by tradition immediately from Christ and His Apostles. Let us now briefly consider the dignity and sanctity of this sacrifice, and the manner of assisting thereat.

To form some idea hereof, we need but consider the dignity of the victim that is here offered, the sanctity of the High Priest who offers it, and the sacred mysteries of our Divine Redeemer's passion and death which are here represented, continued, and renewed. This sacrifice in itself, and as offered by Jesus Christ, is always a most acceptable obla-

tion in the sight of God, independent of the good or bad dispositions of the ministerial priest who performs the outward and visible part. In the first place, it is a most agreeable holocaust, by which the most perfect homage is paid to God ; for though of ourselves we are incapable of paying Him a homage proportionable to His grandeur, being no more than an atom in comparison of His infinite majesty, yet because Jesus Christ humbles Himself here for our sake in the most profound manner, under the poor elements of bread and wine, and offers Himself up by the hands of the priest, *for us* and *with us*, under the mystical appearance of death, we are thereby enabled to render unto God the greatest homage, adoration, and glory that any creature can possibly give to his Creator.

Secondly, the Mass is a most agreeable sacrifice of thanksgiving ; for though all the thanks we can render are of no value in themselves, as proceeding from us, yet because Jesus Christ, whose dignity is infinite, puts Himself here in our place, and gives infinite thanks to His Eternal Father for us, and in our name, we have a gift of infinite value to offer to God, and are thus enabled to make Him an adequate return for the benefits conferred on us. Hence the officiating priest calls on us in the midst of the holy mysteries, and says : *Gratias agamus Domino Deo nostro—Let us return thanks to the Lord our God* ; reminding the congregation hereby to unite themselves with their High Priest, Jesus Christ, and to seize on this favorable opportunity to give unto God the thanks that are justly due to His divine majesty.

Thirdly, the Mass is a sacrifice of impetration ; for though of ourselves we are undeserving of any favor, yet because Jesus Christ offers Himself up here *with us* and *for us*, in order to obtain for us the favors and graces we stand in need of, we have here a most efficacious means to sanctify our petitions, and render them acceptable through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord ; for if He has promised in the Gospel that whatever petition we make in His name shall be granted to us, can we ever be said so properly to ask in His name, and through His merits, as when we appear before the throne of God, with Himself in person, and present Him to the Eternal Father, to be our advocate and petitioner ? This made the great St. John Chrysostom say, above a thousand years ago, of all times, the time of the sacrifice of the Mass is the most seasonable for obtaining the favors of Heaven, and the most advantageous to negotiate with the Almighty, because the body and blood of Christ are then actually upon our altars, where His sacred

blood pleads for us, the virtue of which is infinite, and the voice all-powerful to obtain all that is requested ; for what can God refuse us when we offer Him a God in payment of what we ask ?

Fourthly, the Mass is a sacrifice of propitiation for the living and the dead. The blood of the innocent Lamb of God, the infinite price of our redemption, is here offered in satisfaction for our sins, according to these words, which Christ said at the institution of this sacrifice : *This is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.* He died upon the cross for mankind in general, and offered a full and ample satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. In the Eucharistic sacrifice He mystically renews and presents to His Heavenly Father the death He suffered on the cross, and thereby moves Him to have mercy on us, and to receive us into favor, which He will never fail to do when we accompany the offering of the victim of our reconciliation with the inward sacrifice of a contrite and humble heart and a true repentance for our sins. By this means the graces which Christ has merited for mankind in general by His death, are actually applied to and particularly bestowed on the souls of those who are present at this holy sacrifice, or for whom it is offered in particular, in such manner and proportion as their wants require, and as their greater or less dispositions make them capable of receiving.

Let sinners, therefore, come to this sacrifice with confidence. Jesus Christ will be their mediator and advocate ; His sacred blood will plead their cause and speak in their favor ; it will cry to Heaven for mercy in their behalf ; it will appease the anger of His Eternal Father and disarm His justice ; it will move Him to compassionate them for Christ's sake, and to excite them, by actual and preventing graces, to a true compunction of heart and a sincere detestation of sin. Let the just come to this sacrifice, that their souls may be enriched with the blessings of Heaven, and that their virtues may be crowned with the great gift of final perseverance. Let the faithful in general come to this sacrifice as frequently as the duties of their respective states will allow them. Half an hour out of the four-and-twenty hours in the day cannot be better employed than by consecrating it in this manner to our loving Redeemer, who vouchsafed to hang for the space of three long hours alive on the cross for our sake, in the most excruciating pains.

Now I leave yourselves to judge, my brethren, how culpable those Christians must be who make their domestic affairs, and sometimes their criminal amusements, serve as a screen to their coldness and insensi-

bility ; who frequent the house of God more out of custom and ostentation than a true love for God and a sincere devotion ; who commit so many irreverences even at the foot of the altar, and speak to God with as much carelessness and distraction as if they intended to affront Him ; whose chief prayer is for temporal blessings and not for everlasting happiness ; in fine, who are so far from resembling disciples of Christ, assembled in His name to commemorate the dolorous mysteries of His passion and death, are constantly talking, gazing, disturbing and distracting others. Can such persons expect to draw down the graces and blessings of Heaven, when they approach the altar of God and assist at Mass in so profane, irreligious, and insulting a manner ?

The very nature of this holy sacrifice requires that we should assist at it with great reverence, attention, and devotion, according to the method prescribed in your manuals and books of piety. It is one of the most august mysteries of the Christian religion, and the most divine action that can possibly be done by man on earth. We should be present at it with the most exalted ideas of the grandeur of God, and with the most humble sentiments of our own weakness ; we should go to it as if we were going to Mount Calvary, to be present at the crucifixion and death of our Lord, like Mary, His blessed Mother, and St. John, His beloved Disciple. We should form a proper intention, and propose to ourselves the same great ends for which this sacrifice is offered every day by the Church, namely, to honor, adore, and glorify God ; to give Him thanks for all His favors and benefits ; to obtain through Jesus Christ the virtues, gifts, and graces we still stand in need of ; to appease the wrath of Heaven, to supplicate for the pardon of our sins, and to renew the memory of our Blessed Redeemer's passion and death. O amiable Jesus, how much are we indebted to Thy boundless mercy for leaving us so acceptable a sacrifice ? What obligations are we under to Thy unspeakable goodness ! For our sake Thou didst come down from heaven. Thou hast been torn with scourges, crowned with thorns, nailed by the hands and feet to an ignominious cross, and, not content with all this, Thou renewest the same sacrifice daily for the benefit of our souls. Give us grace, O Divine Saviour, to assist at Thy tremendous mysteries with proper dispositions, and to reverence them so as to reap the blessed fruits of Thy redemption. O may we never slight or neglect so favorable an opportunity of sanctifying our souls. O may we always appear in Thy presence with a lively faith, with a tender piety, with a grateful remembrance of Thy sacred passion, with a spirit of

humility and contrition, and with hearts elevated to Heaven. O may Thy precious blood plead our cause, cancel our iniquities, purify our souls, and open for us the gates of life everlasting. Which is the happiness I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON REFERRING ALL OUR DELIBERATE ACTIONS TO THE HONOR AND GLORY OF GOD.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. The scene at Lake Genesareth.
- II. Our deliberate actions should be referred to the glory of God.
- III. The advantages of performing our deliberate actions for the honor and glory of God.
- IV. A peroration on the sadness of misapplied actions.

Præceptor, per totam noctem laborantes nihil cepimus.—St. Luc. c. v. v. 5.

Master, we have labored all the night, and have taken nothing.—St. Luke, c. v. v. 5

THE Gospel of this day informs us that our Blessed Saviour on a certain day was standing near the Lake of Genesareth; the zealous multitude pressed upon Him with so ardent a desire to hear the Word of God, and to learn the science of salvation from His mouth, that He went into a ship belonging to Simon Peter, which was near the shore, and embraced the favorable opportunity to instruct the people, and break unto them the bread of life. The ship of Peter, in which He preached to them, was a figure of the Holy Catholic Church, wherein the pure Word of God is announced, and from which the faithful are to learn the Divine law, and to receive the orders of Heaven with due submission. The prodigious draught of fishes which, as the Gospel relates, Peter and his companions caught when he launched forth into the deep, and let loose his nets in the name and by the orders of Jesus, denotes the many different nations and tribes of the earth that have been included in the pale of the Church, and converted to the Christian religion by the labors and preaching of the twelve Apostles and their lawful successors in the ministry, who were appointed and constituted the fishers of men's souls, and who were legally sent as Christ was sent by His Heavenly Father, to

teach all nations all that is necessary to be believed and to be practiced in order to obtain salvation. The great draught of fishes also signifies the wonderful power and efficacy of the Word of God ; and the happy fruits it should produce in us are represented by the conversion of Simon Peter and his companions, who were present at the sermon that our Saviour preached to the pious multitude assembled on the shore ; for Simon, first of all, was so deeply penetrated with the heavenly doctrine of Jesus, that he threw himself at His feet, and confessed himself to be an unworthy sinner undeserving of the honor of being favored with His divine presence. His companions were no less sensibly affected. From that instant they became Disciples of Christ, and without the least hesitation devoted themselves entirely to His service and tuition. Relying on Divine Providence, they cheerfully forsook all they possessed, and all their hopes and prospects in the world, in order to amass spiritual treasures for their souls in the kingdom of Heaven. They had labored all night without any success, until they cast out their nets in the name of Jesus, which shows that if we wish to see our poor endeavors crowned with success we must place our confidence in God alone, and implore His divine aid and concurrence. If we rely solely on our own force and natural strength, our expectations will be blasted, and we shall meet with disappointments in the end ; for of ourselves, without the assistance of God's grace, we cannot do the least thing, either in thought, word, or deed, toward our salvation.

Human pride recoils at this truth, which is the very foundation of true Christian humility, and a convincing proof of our weakness and inability to do good and avoid evil, without the actual grace and preventing mercy of God, exciting, strengthening, drawing, and moving us thereto. We stand in need of His continual assistance and concurrence in everything we undertake, as it is *in him we live, in him we move and subsist*. We should, therefore, consult Him in all our enterprises, and all our actions should begin with Him and terminate with Him, as all the lines drawn from the circumference of a circle terminate in the centre. Unless we act in His name, and labor for His honor and glory, the day will come when we shall have reason to cry out with Simon Peter and his companions before their conversion : *Master, we have labored all night, and have taken nothing* ; we have labored in vain and misspent our time to no purpose in grasping at empty shadows and pursuing delusive vanities ; we have undergone much toil and fatigue in the world without any reference to the Lord our God, or a proper regard to the

real and permanent joys of His heavenly kingdom. To guard you, my brethren, against the like misfortune, I will endeavor to show you, first, how incumbent it is on you to refer all your deliberate actions and employments to the honor and glory of God ; and secondly, I will point out the signal advantages that are derived from a faithful compliance with this important duty. Let us previously implore the divine assistance, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, greeting her with the words of the angel, *Ave Maria*.

It is beyond all dispute that God has created us for no other end but to love and serve Him in this life, and to see and enjoy Him in the next. The very title of our Creator gives Him an indefeasible right to our love and service. He is the *Alpha* and the *Omega*, the first cause, the beginning, and the last end of all things. He should then be the constant object of our most ardent desires, the centre of all our undertakings, and the end of all our pursuits and designs. To Him we are indebted for everything, and without Him we can do nothing. He is our sovereign Lord and absolute Master. We have our existence only for His service and pleasure, and are therefore bound in the strictest justice to obey, honor, and glorify Him in all things. Our Blessed Saviour says of Himself : *I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me*—John vi. 38. It is no less true of us, that we have been created by the Almighty God, and placed in this world not to do our own will, but the will of Him that created us. This is the very end of our being, and to deviate from it is to frustrate the gracious designs of our Creator, and oppose His supreme dominion and unlimited jurisdiction over us and all His creatures. Every day, every hour, every moment of our life belongs to Him, and should be employed in serving Him in our respective stations. All our thoughts, words, and actions, and all the motions of our souls, are a debt we owe to His infinite goodness. We ought, of course, to offer, refer, and direct them to Him, and in all our proceedings to aim at promoting His honor and glory. This is not only our duty, but likewise our interest ; for they only who glorify Him will be entitled on the last day to receive that never-fading crown of glory which He promises to his faithful servants, 1 Kings, ii. 30, where He expressly says : *Whosoever shall glorify me, him will I glorify*. He is satisfied to leave the profit and utility of all our works and actions entirely to ourselves, but He reserves all the glory of them to Himself alone ; for, as the Prophet Isaiah tells us (xlii.), *He will not part with his glory, nor give it to another*. It

is His unalienable right, and He will not suffer it to be invaded with impunity.

Reason, as well as religion, teaches us that nothing is more just than that we should have His honor and glory constantly in view, and act always with a pure intention of pleasing Him and complying with His holy will in all things. All Christian virtue depends on this purity of intention. By it the lowest and the least important of our actions are ennobled, elevated to a superior order, and made acts of virtue and works of salvation. Without it, actions the highest, the most brilliant, the most esteemed by men, and the most admired by the world, are good for nothing in the sight of God. Though we should distribute all our substance to the poor, and deliver up our bodies to the flames; though we should convert thousands of souls, and practice all the austerities of the ancient fathers in the desert, yet it avails us nothing in order to life everlasting if our intention or leading principle be nothing but disguised pride, vainglory, and ostentation; for when the intention, which is the eye of the soul, is turned off from God and viciously directed, the action itself, though good in its own nature, becomes vitiated and infected, and the whole work is darksome, according to these words of the Gospel: *If thy eye be simple, thy whole body will be lightsome; but if thy eye be evil, thy whole body shall be darksome*—Mac. vi. 22. This plainly shows the necessity of rectifying our intention, and acting always upon a proper motive in all our proceedings. It is not sufficient that what we do and say be good in itself; it must also be good in all its circumstances; it must be done with a good intention; otherwise it will not be worthy of God's complacency and acceptance; neither will it be placed to our account on the last day by the Sovereign Judge and Searcher of Hearts, who will not reward with eternal glory those actions that are not done for His sake, nor referred to the honor and glory of His holy name. Then, alas! many Christians, who, on account of some external practices of devotion and exercises of piety to which they are accustomed, flatter themselves that they are amassing spiritual treasures, and that they are rich in virtue and good works, shall find themselves wretched and miserable, poor, blind, bare, and naked, as the Scripture says of the bishop in the Apocalypse. They shall find their hands empty and void of merits, and their souls as unprovided with good works as they were when they first entered into the world. It may be truly said of them, what Simon Peter said in this day's Gospel, that *they labor all night and take nothing*, for they work in the dark; and

when the fatal night of death arrives they will be entitled to no other reward than that of hypocrites, because, instead of laboring for God, they sacrifice their actions to human applause, to blind self-love, and to the inclinations of natural constitution. Their alms-deeds, their fasts, their long prayers, their very best actions are tainted and poisoned in their very root ; their pretended virtues are no better than pagan or Pharisaical virtues ; their whole merit is destroyed, and they are unworthy of God's acceptance, because they are not actuated by the spirit of God, but influenced only by the selfish motives of interest and sensuality. They neither labor with God nor for God, but for a worldly and human respect, which they blindly make their last end.

To guard against this misfortune, we should *aim at perfection in all our works*, as the Scripture recommends—Eccles. xxxiii. 23. We should consider attentively what spirit it is that moves us, what it is we do, and for whom we do it. We should begin each day with an oblation of ourselves to God, direct all our actions to his greater honor and glory, and from time to time renew our intentions of performing them with a view and desire of pleasing Him. We should shut our eyes against all human respect, and raise our hearts and thoughts to Heaven in the course of the day ; and then if vainglory should happen to come and claim a part of what we do, we may say with St. Bernard : *You come too late ; all is already given to God ; I neither began for your sake, nor will I leave off for your sake.* Tertullian informs us that the primitive Christians were accustomed to sign themselves with the sign of the cross at the beginning of each work they undertook, and to offer it to the honor and glory of God, in the name of Jesus Christ, to signify thereby that they performed all their actions in His name, and in conjunction with His sufferings and laborious life here on earth, in hopes of finding acceptance with God the Father, through His beloved Son Jesus, and rendering their own works valuable and meritorious in His sight, by being united to His infinite merits ; for, as the Scripture says, *There is no other name under heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved ; neither is there salvation in any other*—Acts, iv. 12. Whatever we do independently of Him, however laudable it may appear in the eyes of the world, cannot contribute toward our eternal salvation ; for nothing can be conducive in any degree toward it but through the merits of Christ, which are applied to our souls only by His grace. *We are not sufficient*, says St. Paul (2 Cor. iii. 5), *to think anything of ourselves, as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is from*

God. Whatever progress we make in virtue of Christian perfection flows from His mercy and grace through Jesus Christ. It is *he who worketh in us, both to will and to accomplish, according to his good will*—Phil. ii. 13. *It is he who begins the good work in us, and who also perfects it*—Phil. i. 6. What we do in union with His grace, actually moving us thereto, partakes of His merits, but the moral actions that are done by the mere strength of nature do not partake of His merits, and consequently do not merit a supernatural reward, though they may receive from God some temporal recompense in this life. Hence St. Paul says (1 Cor. xii. 3): *No man can say, the Lord Jesus, but by the Holy Spirit*, that is, so as to conduce to his eternal happiness: and Christ Himself also says: *Without me you can do nothing*—Jo. x. 5.

However, it is certain *that we may abound to every good work* (2 Cor. ix. 8), with the assistance of the actual grace of God exciting and aiding us thereto. *I can do all things in him who strengtheneth me*, says St. Paul—Phil. iv. 13. Though our nature has been greatly vitiated by original sin; though our service is of no manner of use to God, and cannot add the smallest mite to His happiness; though all we do is in itself contemptible, of no value, and unworthy of His acceptance, yet He is willing to reward us in the most ample manner, as if He derived some great advantage from our poor endeavors. He treats us, not as servants, but as children; He knows our weakness, has compassion on our miseries, and treats our frailties with the greatest indulgence; even when we offend Him He pities and spares us, and is ready to embrace us again with open arms upon our repentance. He has the strictest right to all our works and actions, and yet such is His bounty and liberality, that He does not demand our service gratis, but solemnly engages His sacred word to reward all that we suffer for His sake with *an eternal weight of glory*—2 Cor. iv. He does not make sanctity and salvation depend solely on extraordinary and heroic exploits; He does not say in the Gospel, you cannot be partakers of my glory, unless you renounce entirely to the world; unless you distribute all your substance to the poor; unless you retire into the desert and practice the greatest austerities; unless you suffer martyrdom and spill your blood for my sake. It is true, we should be in a disposition of mind to do all this, if He required it; but He takes the most easy of all virtues, and as He produced all things out of nothing, He knows how to draw the greatest merits from the most trivial services, and is willing to sanctify

the smallest of our actions by His grace, and render them rewardable in His sight. The Gospel assures us that He rewards not only those who offer their treasures, but likewise those who contribute their mites ; it expressly declares the acceptance of the widow's mite, and says that he who gives a cup of cold water in His name and for His sake shall be recompensed. O, my brethren, what a pleasure, what a comfort, what a happiness is it to have so merciful a God, so good a Father, so bountiful a Master to deal with, who leaves nothing unrewarded that is done for His sake, and with a view of pleasing Him ? Though of ourselves we are *unprofitable servants to him, even after doing all that is commanded*, as the Scripture speaks (Luke xvii. 10), yet we may become *profitable servants to ourselves* at a very easy rate. There is not an action of itself so inconsiderable but we may render available to our salvation, by undertaking it in God's name and referring it to His honor and glory. Even the most ordinary actions of human life, such as eating and drinking, may by this means be changed into Christian virtues, and entitled to a reward. Hence the Apostle gives us the following advice : *Whether ye eat or drink, or whatever else ye do in word or in work, do all things for the glory of God, and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*—Coloss. iii. 17. To act thus in His name, to unite in spirit with Him, and to have His glory and honor at heart in all that we do, is the surest and shortest way to store up valuable treasures for our souls in the kingdom of Heaven upon the most easy terms. There is not a day, nor an hour in the day, but we may, in our respective states, offer up pleasing sacrifices to God, and discharge the functions of the holy and royal priesthood, which belongs to all the faithful, according to these words of St. Peter (1 Ep. ii. 5) : *You are a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*. The ecclesiastic in discharging the duties of his ministry, the master in his family, the artist and tradesmen in their shop, the servant and laborer at their work, meet with a thousand opportunities of merit, and have it in their power to offer constant sacrifices of their own will, their own liberty, their own ease, their own repose and convenience. Did they but avail themselves of the daily occasions they have to practice the excellent virtues of humility, patience, charity, justice, fidelity, obedience, and submission to the will of God, who placed them in the station they fill, what a fund of merit would they acquire, what an ample provision would they lay up for a happy eternity ? How easily would they enhance the value of the ordinary actions and employ-

ments of each day? How speedily would they enrich their souls, and purchase a seat of glory hereafter? The pains they undergo, the hardships and difficulties they have to encounter, the losses and crosses, the mortifications, contradictions, and disappointments they meet at home and abroad, would become pledges of immortality and so many seeds of life everlasting, were they borne with patience and resignation, and duly offered to God in the spirit of penance; but for want of being referred thus to Him they often remain fruitless, and resemble a hidden treasure, that turns to little or no account to the owner, for want of a little care and good management on his part.

As to servants, workmen, and the laborious poor, who compose the bulk and generality of mankind, nothing but a supine neglect of their salvation can hinder them from practicing this easy and beneficial method of sanctifying their servile works and toilsome employments. Great numbers of them are slaves and drudges from the cradle to the coffin; their life in itself is more painful and more austere than the life of many who are shut up in cloisters: they are ill fed, poorly clothed, and exposed to the inclemency of the weather, and to the rigors of the seasons; they work hard, and labor in the sweat of their brow for the subsistence of a short life in this world, without partaking of any considerable share of its comforts and conveniences. The hardships they undergo, and the fatigues, distresses, afflictions, and poverty they endure, are capable of being sanctified and made means to obtain life everlasting; and yet they often turn to no account or advantage to their souls, for want of being offered to God, and borne patiently in the spirit of penance: so that laboring hard the whole year, they have all they can expect here when they receive their poor wages, and they are entitled to no recompense hereafter, because they spend their sweat and spirits in laboring without any reference to God, and act only out of custom, human respect, and principles merely natural. *They have sowed much, says the Prophet Aggeus, and brought in little*—i. 6. *They labor all night and take nothing*, or reap no spiritual advantage from their labor, because they neither labor for God nor with God; nay, what is still more deplorable, many of them have reason to apprehend, that after having had a kind of purgatory here on earth they will have a hell hereafter, on account of the detestable habits of cursing, swearing, blaspheming, drunkenness, filching, and stealing to which the lower orders are unhappily addicted, and which they will not suffer themselves to be prevailed on to renounce.

What a melancholy reflection is this, my brethren ? Is it not a pity that Christians, created for Heaven, shall thus lose the merit of all their hardships, toils and fatigues, and run the risk of becoming slaves to Satan in flames for all eternity, after having been poor slaves and drudges in this life ? By regulating their conduct, and bearing the sufferings and distresses annexed to their state with patience, due reverence, and submission to the will of God, who, after the fall of Adam, enjoined labor on mankind as a penance due to sin, they would make a virtue of necessity, and bid fair for a more exalted seat in the kingdom of Heaven than will fall to the lot of those who are placed in a more exalted station in this world. Their hardships would be sweetened, their pains would be doubly rewarded, and whilst their hands are employed at their daily labor and earning an honest livelihood for the support of their bodies, they would earn a never-fading crown of glory for their souls. O Almighty and Eternal God, give us grace to serve Thee in our respective states with zeal and fidelity, and to improve the time of our mortal pilgrimage in this vale of misery to the best advantage, that our days may be filled with good works when the night of death comes, in which no one can labor. Grant, we beseech Thee, that, through the infinite merits of our Blessed Redeemer, we may then find acceptance with Thee, and be entitled to hear these words of comfort : *Well done, good and faithful servant ; because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things ; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord*—Matt. xxv. 23. Which I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TRUE AND FALSE VIRTUE.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. True and false virtue in the Scribes and Pharisees.
- II. The difference between true and false virtue.
- III. The motives which excite us to true virtue.
- IV. A prayer for true virtue.

Nisi abundaverit justitia vestra plusquam Scribarum et Phariseorum, non intrabit in regnum Cœlorum.—St. Matt. c. v. v. 20.

Unless your justice abound more than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven.—St. Matt. c. v. v. 20.

NOTHING is more dangerous than to disguise the venom of a false doctrine, and the disorders of a criminal conduct, under the outward appearance of truth, and the veil of an eminent sanctity. Our Divine Redeemer has taken care to caution us both against the one and the other. He bids us *to beware of false prophets, who come to you in the clothing of sheep, but inwardly are ravening wolves*, intent only on the seduction and ruin of the flock. They intrude themselves into the ministry without any lawful mission, and endeavor, under the specious pretext of retrenching abuses, to surprise the simple and the unwary by their captious speeches, and to impose on them by their fallacious appearances. *By their fruits you shall know them*, says our Blessed Saviour—Matt. vii. 16. In the Gospel of this day He also forewarns us against the false justice and hypocrisy of those dissemblers who, like unto the Scribes and Pharisees, conceal a depraved heart under the cloak of piety, and wish to pass in the eyes of the world for what they really are not in the sight of God. The Scribes were Doctors of the Jewish law; they *sat on the chair of Moses*, and therefore Christ ordered the people to follow their doctrine, and *to do as they said, but not to follow their example, or do as they did*—Matt. xxiii. The Pharisees were so called, as St. Epiphanius remarks, from dividing or separating themselves from the rest of the people, and pretending to observe the law with greater exactness; nothing was more reserved or composed than their exterior. One would be apt to imagine that they

might be proposed as models of piety, and patterns of virtue, if the All-seeing Searcher of Hearts had not pronounced the sentence of their condemnation, and expressly declared that unless you be more just, more perfect, and more virtuous than they were, you shall be excluded from the kingdom of Heaven. Your eternal salvation, therefore, depending hereon, it is highly incumbent on you to know in what particulars the virtues of the Scribes and Pharisees were defective, and in what degree of justice and perfection you are obliged to surpass them, that you may carefully avoid the rocks on which they unhappily split, and abound in the justice wherein they failed. This is the important subject which I intend to lay before you in the following discourse, wherein I shall briefly point out the difference between true and false virtue, and endeavor to excite you to the love and pursuit of the one, and to a dislike and aversion to the other. Let us previously invoke the light of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, greeting her for this purpose with the words of the Archangel Gabriel. *Ave Maria.*

As the most brilliant gold is not always the most pure, so in like manner the most shining virtue is not always the most perfect, nor the most acceptable in the sight of God, who regards our hearts and the inward dispositions of our souls more than our outward works and actions. He often condemns the hearts of those whose actions the world admires, and reproves as false justice and disguised pride those very virtues which seem brightest in the eyes of men. Whatever exterior homage we pay unto Him must be enlivened by the interior spirit, and accompanied with the inward affections and worship of the heart; for if the heart does not concur, and join in the interior sentiments, and worship with the exterior performance, instead of being a true homage, it is to be deemed no better than an empty sign and shadow of religion, like unto the external performances of the Scribes and Pharisees, who were apparently zealous in the service of God, and regular in the observance of the outward practices of religion, but neglected the interior and more essential duties. Hence our Blessed Saviour reproveth all this outward show and glittering appearance of virtue as false, counterfeit and defective. *You hypocrites* (said He to them, Matt. xv. 7), *well hath Isaias prophesied of you, saying, this people honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.* His charity and zeal for the conversion of their souls prompted Him to reprehend them severely for their defects, and to inveigh constantly against their false

virtues, in order to make them enter into themselves and hinder them from seducing others. He has left nothing painted in more lively colors in the Gospel than the picture He has drawn from them in St. Matthew, xxiii., where He exhibits a frightful view of their spiritual disorders for our instruction, that by way of contrast, true virtue may appear in its genuine beauty, and be the more easily distinguished and reduced to practice, without giving into the impressions of a mistaken piety or the wild imaginations of a false devotion.

It is evident from the character that Christ our Lord has given of these pretended saints and false devouts, that hypocrisy, or a dissimulation and sanctity was one of their capital faults ; they recited long prayers, observed rigorous fasts, gave alms in abundance, and practiced many excellent acts of virtue in outward appearance. Were we as exemplary and edifying in our deportment and exterior conduct, as liberal in the distribution of alms, as addicted to prayer, and as observant of our other religious duties as they were, we would be apt to think ourselves sure of our salvation ; and yet it is certain, that unless we surpass them in virtue *we shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven*. It is not sufficient to do what is good in itself, but it must be done with a good intention ; for it is the intention that generally stamps the character of virtue or vice on our actions. Had the Scribes and Pharisees acted upon proper motives and with a pure intention, the good works they performed might have entitled them to an eternal reward, but they acted upon selfish motives of human respect, and with a view of being esteemed and applauded by the world, and therefore Christ told them that they received their desired reward in this life, and they were entitled to no other recompense in the next life but that of hypocrites, *weeping and gnashing of teeth*. The sin of hypocrisy, which is the unhappy offspring of pride and vainglory, ran universally through all their actions, and tainted them in their very root ; it poisoned their very best works, ruined all their virtues, and destroyed their whole merit. When they prayed, they chose thoroughfares and public places for this purpose, that people passing by might see and take notice of them. When they distributed alms to the poor, they caused a trumpet to sound before them, that every one might be informed of their charitable dispositions. When they fasted, they put on an air of sadness, disfigured their faces, and affected to look pale, that the world might entertain a favorable opinion of the rigor and austerity of their fasts. Our Blessed Saviour, who perfectly knew the malice of every sin, with its fatal influ-

ences and consequences, seems to warn us in the Gospel against no one crime in nature more frequently than against vainglory and its usual attendant, hypocrisy, as it is under the shelter of this most pernicious weed that all vices grow and every virtue is blasted. *Beware ye* (says He, Luke, xii. 1), *of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy*; and Matt. vi. 1, *Take heed that you do not your justice before men, to be seen by them; otherwise you shall not have a reward of your Father who is in heaven.* And that the light which is in us may not be darkness, He orders us to *pray in private*, when we pray in particular, and when we give alms, *not to let the left hand know what the right hand gives*; and when we fast, *to anoint our head and wash our face*; that is, to rectify our intention, to purify our hearts and discharge every duty with a sincere and effectual desire to obey, please, and glorify the Lord our God, who sees us in private, and will reward us in public, provided we make His honor and glory our last end and the ruling principle of all our good actions.

Another capital vice that Christ reproached the Pharisees with was their want of fraternal charity, and their rash censorious disposition to judge and condemn others without sufficient grounds. They had so presumptuous an opinion of their own imaginary excellence, that they looked down with scorn and contempt upon their neighbor, and were so quick-sighted as to discern *a mote in his eye* (Matt. vii. 3), at the same time that they did not *perceive a beam in their own eyes*; that is, they censured his lesser failings, and even misconstrued his innocent actions, but were blind to their own greater faults, and overlooked the malice and corruption that their hearts were filled with. They separated themselves from infidels and publicans, as from persons that were unworthy even to touch their garments, and observed with the utmost punctuality and exactness certain ceremonies, such as washing their hands before meat, and the like, but failed in the observance of the indispensable duties of charity and brotherly love, *straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel* (Matt. xxiii.), that is, observing the law in matters of little consequence, whilst they transgressed its most weighty and essential precepts without remorse. He therefore compared them to *whitened sepulchres, which are fair without, and appear beautiful to men, but are foul within and full of all corruption*; for, in like manner they appeared outwardly just to men, but within were full of hypocrisy, and palliated a large stock of pride, envy, jealousy, disdain and contempt of others, under the cover of sanctity and the mask of an apparent piety.

Is not this, my brethren, a natural picture of the conduct of several persons of our days, who deceive themselves with the empty shadows of virtue, and neglect the substance? If we confront their lives with the lives of the Pharisees, what a near resemblance shall we discover between them! How many will you find, in the very midst of Christianity, whose lives are a strange medley of real sins and counterfeit virtues! They stumble at straws and leap over blocks; they scruple at trifles and violate the most important duties with little or no remorse; they tremble at phantoms and despise realities; they are exact and formal, even to a nicety, in performing certain works of supererogation, which they impose on themselves, or have a relish for, and they overlook the great precepts of charity and brotherly love without any concern; they refrain their hands from gross crimes of a scandalous nature, that would reflect dishonor on them in the eyes of the world, but they pay no attention to their interior, which is full of poison and deadly corruption; they carry a fair outside, but make no account of indulging evil thoughts and desires, of entertaining resentments and animosities, of forming rash judgments and groundless suspicions of their neighbor, and harboring hatred, envy, malice, and revenge in their hearts. They will sometimes spend whole hours in running over a number of vocal prayers and customary devotions in the morning, and employ the remainder of the day in defaming a neighbor and blackening his character with vile calumnies and detractions; they appear to be models of piety in the house of God, but upon the least cross they meet with, or the smallest contradiction that thwarts their inclinations, they abandon themselves to the sallies of their passions, and become sour, peevish, ill-humored, impatient, and intolerable in their family at home. They have hearts of flint when the cries of the poor resound in their ears; they think nothing of stopping the wages of a servant, of depriving the honest tradesman of his due, of wronging the helpless widow and the fatherless orphan, of refusing to pay their lawful debts, and make restitution of what they unjustly acquired and as unjustly possess. What is this else, my brethren, but pharisaical piety and false virtue? This is what made St. Jerome cry out and say: Woe be to us Christians, who are so unfortunate as to inherit the vices of the Pharisees! The dreadful menaces which the Gospel thunders out against them should deter us from following their example, and should inspire us with an utter aversion to their hypocrisy, pride and arrogance, vainglory and ostentation.

Before all things, we must keep the commandments of God, and discharge the essential duties of charity and justice, in preference to any work of supererogation. We are to be punctual and faithful even in little things. *These we ought to do*, says our Saviour (Luke, xi. 42), *and not leave great and weighty things undone*. We are to comply with our religious duties, and fulfill all the obligations of our respective states and conditions of life, with such an outward decency as may give edification to all that see us. We are to encourage each other mutually to virtue by the light of our good example; for Christ orders us to *let our light shine before men*; but then our last end and all things must be, *that our Father, who is in heaven, may be glorified thereby*. He regards the motive and intention upon which we act more than the action, and requires us to be as strictly virtuous in His sight as we appear in the eyes of the world to be. His holy will is to be always the rule of our conduct; He only must be adored and worshiped in the temple of our souls; no idol of pride or vainglory must be suffered to stand on the altar of our hearts, or to share in the honor that is due to Him alone. To seek ourselves, or, Pharisee-like, to court the esteem and applause of the world in the performance of our spiritual and devotional exercises, is the ready way to destroy their merit and to forfeit the crown that Christ has promised to His faithful servants; since, as St. Paul speaks in his epistle to the Galatians, *Were I to study to please men I would not be the servant of Christ*. And, really, nothing is more unworthy a rational being, nothing more unbecoming a Christian, than to labor for the applause of the world and the encomiums of men, which cannot add a single grain to his merit, when he may acquire an eternal recompense from God by laboring for His honor and glory. Is not the esteem and empty applause of men too small a reward for a virtuous action? What can be more precarious, more inconstant, or more capricious, since those who love, esteem and praise us to-day, may hate, undervalue, and decry us to-morrow? A false report, a mere groundless fancy, a casual indiscretion, is sufficient to rob a man in an instant of all the esteem and popular applause he has been laboring to acquire for a series of years.

The truly virtuous Christian, like unto the Apostle, sets no great value on the judgments of men. He seeks his happiness and the recompense of his good works only in God, and looks for nothing beyond him. *Where his treasure is, there also is his heart*—Matt. vi. 21; and the mark he constantly aims at is this motto of St. Ignatius: *To the greater*

glory of God. He amasses spiritual treasures for his soul, which neither the moth of vainglory, nor the worm of pride, nor the rust of any criminal passion can consume, corrode, or eat up, because he takes care to resist their suggestions, and to practice this short lesson, which Jesus Christ prescribes in the Gospel : *Learn from me to be meek and humble of heart.* He is convinced that humility is the basis, the guardian, and, as St. Augustine calls it, the fortress and citadel of every virtue. It cherishes, preserves, and secures the other virtues ; for, as natural fire is preserved under ashes, so the supernatural fire of charity, attended with the whole train of the other virtues, is never more safe or better secured than when it is hidden under the ashes of a profound humility. Herein consists the difference between charity and humility. *Charity covers a multitude of sins*—1 Pet. iv. Humility covers and hides a multitude of virtues which accompany it, and secures them from all imminent dangers. Without it no virtue can be acceptable in the sight of God. It is the first, the second, and the third degree to raise us to glory, as St. Augustine says. If it does not precede the other virtues to prepare us for them ; if it does not accompany them to sanctify them ; if it does not follow them to preserve them, we will lose the fruit and benefit of them. It was the want of humility that rendered the virtues of the Pharisees so defective, and deprived them of the benefit of all their outward works of piety and devotion. Their misfortune should be a warning to us to practice what they were deficient in, and to keep at the greatest distance from the vices for which they were reproved.

O sweet Jesus, grant us this grace, we most humbly beseech Thee. Thou hast taught us humility by Thy word ; Thou hast taught us humility by Thy example. O may we imitate Thee by humbling ourselves here on earth, that we may be found worthy on the last day to be exalted to the kingdom of Heaven, and to inherit those never-fading crowns of glory which Thou hast prepared for Thy faithful servants. And which I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON CHRISTIAN TEMPERANCE AND SOBRIETY.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. Christian temperance.
- II. The abuses we are to avoid in food.
- III. The sanctity arising from Christian temperance.
- IV. The means to procure it.
- V. Exhortation to practice it.

Accipiens septem panes, et gratias agens, fregit et dabat Discipulis suis ut apponerent.—*St. Marc. c. viii. v. 6.*

Jesus taking the seven loaves, giving thanks, he broke, and gave them to his Disciples to set before the multitude.—*St. Mark, c. viii. v. 6.*

WE read in this day's Gospel that a great multitude of people, consisting of about four thousand persons, having followed our Divine Redeemer into the desert with an ardent desire of hearing the Word of God, exposed themselves by their zeal to the danger of fainting in the way with hunger, as they were fasting after the fatigues of a long and painful journey of three days, and were not provided with the common necessities of life, having no more than seven loaves and a few little fishes among them all—a small pittance for four thousand people ! But He who embraces all mankind with the tenderness of a father, and who drew the universe out of nothing by His Almighty power, took care to provide for the subsistence of their bodies, after He had nourished their souls with the spiritual food of His heavenly doctrine ; for He multiplied the loaves and fishes in such a manner that seven baskets were filled with the fragments which remained after the whole multitude had eaten as much as satisfied their appetite. This illustrious miracle affords us several excellent lessons concerning Christian temperance, one of the four cardinal virtues, which are so called from a Latin word that signifies *a hinge*, because they are, as it were, the hinges on which all the mortal virtues of a Christian life chiefly depend. St. Gregory the Great, speaking of the duties of Christian temperance, remarks three great disorders with regard to the nourishment of the body, which it is the duty of temperance to retrench and rectify : First, a servile attachment to the body ; secondly, excessive repletion and

surfeiting ; thirdly, an over-great anxiety and solicitude in procuring nice and delicate meats. The principal function of temperance is to govern, regulate, and subject the body to the spirit, in order to subject the spirit the more easily to God. For this end it moderates that inordinate affection which makes a man in some measure a slave to his body ; secondly, it restrains our sensual appetites from brutal excesses, hinders us from surpassing the bounds of want, and makes us rest contented with what is necessary for our support ; thirdly, it retrenches all delicacy in seeking nice and exquisite meats to please and gratify the palate, nothing being more contrary to the spirit of the Gospel, and to that obligation which it enjoins to lead a penitential life, and mortify the flesh with its vices and concupiscences. These disorders, which occur so frequently in the use of that food which the bountiful Author of Nature has created for our necessary support, and intended for our relief, are pointed out to us in this day's Gospel, and therefore I shall make them the subject of the following discourse. In the first place, I will show you what defects and abuses we are to avoid in the refectation of our bodies ; and in the second, you shall see what sanctity this refectation is susceptible of, and by what means it may be purified and perfected. Let us previously invoke the aid of the Divine Spirit, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, &c. *Ave Maria.*

Experience convinces us that there is no action of human life more liable to great abuses and disorders than the nourishment of our bodies, by which nature endeavors to repair its weakened force, but by which passion, instead of confining itself within the bounds of necessity, abandons itself to the most shameful and the most scandalous excesses in point of eating and drinking. Christ was willing to correct those excesses by giving us a shining example of temperance in the great miracle He wrought in the Gospel of this day. He nourished and fed a numerous multitude of people ; but before all things he disengaged them from being too solicitous about the support of their bodies, by taking them into a solitary place, into a barren desert, destitute of all human relief, and unprovided with the common necessities of life. He gave them no corporal nourishment until they were hungry and stood in need of being refreshed. In fine, he furnished them with no nice or delicate meats, dressed out in the most exquisite manner for the purpose of pleasing the palate, but supplied them with plain, common food, fit only to repel hunger, namely, a few little fishes and bread. Let us observe all the circumstances of this grand miracle, and consider how surprising it was

to see so many thousands of men running after our Divine Redeemer, and marching into a frightful solitude, without succors, without provisions, without thinking of their corporal wants, or being disheartened at the barrenness of the place or the difficulty of the road. O what a difference was there between this pious multitude, which followed the Son of God with so much resolution and so much constancy, and those ancient Jews who formerly followed Moses into the deserts of Palestine ! Scarcely had the latter opened their eyes to observe the journey, which their legislator and leader pointed out to them, when they began to cry out and murmur against him ; a criminal diffidence seized and possessed their hearts ; the meats of Egypt came incessantly into their memory, and in vain did Moses work so many prodigies to animate them ; in vain did he break the waves of the sea and sweeten its bitterness ; in vain did he draw fountains of water out of the rock by a stroke of his rod. These carnal men would not be content till they were glutted. Always taken up with the thoughts of their belly, they cried out (Exod. xvi) : *We wish we had remained till death closed our eyes in the place of our exile, where we had bread in abundance.* But, alas ! their gluttony, their sensuality, their thirst after the flesh-pots of Egypt, soon drew down the vengeance of Heaven upon them in the desert. It was their servile attachment to their belly that brought them to the shameful crime of idolatry and made them adore the golden calf. It was their intemperance in eating and drinking that caused the anger of God to descend upon them and to destroy several thousands of them *whilst the food was yet in their mouths*, as the Scripture expresses it.

Such was the greediness of that sensual nation, and such, alas ! is the conduct of many Christians in our days, who, as St. Paul remonstrated to the Philippians, live like apostates and enemies of the cross of Jesus Christ. Men delivered up to their senses, immersed in flesh and blood, idolators of themselves, who have no other end to expect but eternal perdition, because they make a god of their belly, and have no other thought, no other view, no other occupation, but to nourish and fatten their bodies, and to lead a carnal, sensual, luxurious, and epicurean life. How many are there to be found amongst them, who, far from forgetting their corporal wants, as the pious multitude did in this day's Gospel, to come and hear Jesus Christ in the person of His ministers, shamefully break the most solemn fasts of the Church and neglect every opportunity of sanctifying their souls for the sake of a party of pleasure ? How many who abandon all the exercises of piety

on Sundays, and on the greatest festivals in the year, rather than drop the least opportunity of making good cheer and indulging and gratifying their senses ! What else is this, my brethren, but to resemble the children of Israel, who preferred the leeks and onions of Egypt to the manna from Heaven ! What else is it, but to imitate Esau, who forfeited his inheritance for a dish of lentils, and sold his birthright for a mess of pottage ! It is evident that nothing is more opposite to the spirit of the Gospel, which almost in every page inculcates the indispensable obligation of doing penance, of curbing and restraining our sensual appetites, of denying ourselves, of retrenching all superfluities, of living soberly, justly, and piously, and of bearing a resemblance of the mortification of Jesus in our mortal flesh.

All the saints of the New Testament, convinced hereof, practiced the most rigorous austerities, and spent their days in the most laborious exercises of penance and self-denial, without allowing themselves any further relaxation than was absolutely necessary to support life. St. Bernard, as the history of his life relates, was accustomed to have recourse to food as to medicine, for the preservation of his health. St. Augustine, after his conversion, was so nice in this point that, as we read in the Book of his Confessions, it was a pain to him to eat or drink, lest he should be led astray by the stream of concupiscence, and fall into the least intemperance under the veil of necessity. Our Blessed Saviour took care to forewarn us against this evil, saying (Luke xxi.), *Look well to yourselves, and be upon your guard, lest perhaps your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting.* It was for this reason that He made no provision for the four thousand men who had followed him in the desert, until He found them pinched with hunger, and under a necessity of taking food, *lest they should faint in the way.* He could have prevented this want ; He could have furnished them with food in abundance, as His almighty power had furnished the Israelites in the desert with manna and fowl from Heaven ; but He waited until they were in necessity, to give us to understand, as St. Basil observes, that necessity alone ought to be our rule, when we intend to give nourishment to our bodies, and not sensuality, greediness, or a blind voracious appetite, which is not easily satisfied when way is once given to it. Nature itself requires no more than what it precisely wants ; it is content with what is necessary for our support, and an immoderate use of meat and drink serves only to depress and overwhelm it. Thousands have impaired their health, shortened their lives,

and brought themselves to an untimely end by gluttony. Nay, it is written that gluttony has destroyed more than the sword, inasmuch as it engenders, feeds, and foment an abundance of superfluous and noxious humors, which, settled in the body, give rise to the numberless diseases that hurry millions into the other world. Nothing, on the contrary, is more conducive to health than a regimen of life ; nothing more serviceable to the body than a regular diet ; nothing more salutary or more powerful to prevent and remove corporal distempers than Christian temperance : it is the physician of the soul as well as of the body, the support of old age, and the surest means to re-establish a broken constitution ; for it has been often proved by experience that temperance has cured diseases which obstinately defied all the power of the strongest medicines ; and it is well known that the ancient patriarchs and recluses, by leading an abstemious and temperate life, prolonged their days to a surprising old age.

The very pagans themselves, as Arnobious, a celebrated writer, informs us, were so sensible of the salutary effects of temperance, and of the many dismal consequences of intemperance, that they were accustomed to place their idols at their tables, in public view of the guests they had invited, that the sight of them might serve to prevent the company from falling into any criminal excesses, and to keep them within the limits of a just moderation. Whosoever cast his eyes on these false divinities, became more circumspect and more reserved in eating and drinking before them, it being deemed then a kind of sacrilege to dishonor the presence of their idols by any intemperance or indecent behavior. What a lesson is this for Christians ! Imaginary gods inspired the greatest libertines with a respectful fear, and deterred them from giving into excess, and shall Christians pay no attention or regard to the presence of the true and living God ? Ah ! my brethren, says St. John Chrysostom, let Jesus Christ assist at all your entertainments ; let Him be one of your guests ; let Him hold the first place ; let Him receive all the honors of your table ; let Him preside at all your recreations, and have a share in them. If you follow this rule, gluttony and drunkenness will be banished from your houses ; voluptuousness and licentiousness will be eliminated ; immodest discourses, *double entendres*, and lapped-up speeches, with which the tables of Christians are so often profaned, will be no more the favorite topic of conversation ; and instead of staining the character of such as are absent, either by raillery or detraction, as is but too frequently the case, your tables will

be sanctified, and your entertainments will be seasoned with an edifying conversation. Such was the advice, such was the practice of the great St. Augustine. He caused two verses to be written at the head of his table, forbidding there all kinds of detraction and immoral conversation, and he ordered a book of piety to be always read to his guests whilst they were eating their meats, and taking their repasts, to the end that their souls might be spiritually nourished, at the same time that they were feeding their bodies with corporal food.

It is thus, my brethren, that we may perfect and sanctify the care of feeding the body ; for though it be one of the grossest actions of human life, and common to us with the beasts, which should contribute very much to humble the pride of man, yet it may become altogether holy, altogether supernatural and meritorious, by being duly referred to God's honor and glory, and performed with a pure intention of pleasing and obeying Him. For this end we must take our meals, not for the gratification of a sensual appetite, but as a remedy for corporal weakness, for the necessary support of nature, and for the preservation of our being, which we are commanded to preserve, until it shall please the Sovereign Lord of life and death to put a final period to our mortal existence. This must be our leading principle when we have recourse to food, according to the advice of the Apostle, and according to the model prescribed by our Saviour in this day's Gospel. *Taking the seven loaves*, says the Evangelist, *he blessed them, and returned thanks to his Heavenly Father*, whereby He elevated this human action above its ordinary level, and raised it to a supernatural degree. This is the model, according to which we ought to regulate ourselves and sanctify our tables. In imitation of the Son of God, we are to lift up our hearts, our eyes, and our hands to Heaven to honor our Sovereign Lord and bountiful Creator, who vouchsafes to provide for our support and preservation. Whenever we make use of those things His providence has sent for our nourishment, it is but just that we should receive them from His hands with respect, with gratitude, with love and thanksgiving.

St. Ambrose remarks, that the two Disciples whom our Blessed Saviour met on the way to the castle of Emmaus, knew Him *in the breaking of bread*, and this because, according to His usual custom, He blessed the bread before He eat of it. It is by this same ceremony, says the holy Doctor, that Christ always knew and knows as yet his true disciples. Are you willing, then, to act as true disciples and faithful

servants of Jesus Christ? *Whether ye eat or drink, you are to do all for the honor and glory of God, and to receive all things from his holy hand with thanksgiving*; for it is the height of ingratitude to partake of His gifts, and to enjoy His blessings without a proper acknowledgment.

But why do we bless the meat we make use of? demands St. John Chrysostom. Is it unclean in itself? No, my brethren, answers this holy Doctor, but we who make use of it are unclean. What I fear, O Lord, says St. Augustine, is not the uncleanness of the meat, because I know it comes from Thee, but I fear my own uncleanness, and for this reason, I always begin by prayer. By this I acknowledge it to be the gift of Thy hands, that Thou art the author of it, and that I hold it from Thee. Receiving it thus, I receive it with respect, with gratitude, with love, and by this means I purify my soul. The food which is thus received, is also *sanctified by the Word of God*, as St. Paul says—1 Tim. iv. It is sanctified by the blessing and thanksgiving which ought to be always given before and after meals, in imitation of the primitive Christians, who, since the earliest years of Christianity, were always accustomed to observe this pious practice most religiously. They not only make themselves known as Christians in celebrating the divine mysteries, in partaking of the body and blood of Christ, and in hearing His holy word, but they also sanctified their tables as well as their sacrifice; they praised and glorified God's holy name, not only in the Temple, but likewise in their pious assemblies, and at the repasts where they eat together, and enjoyed themselves in the Lord with modesty and reservedness; they took the necessary support of nature with a pure intention, in obedience to the will of God, and as a medicine for the preservation of health, seasoning it with the remembrance of the gall and vinegar that our Blessed Saviour was presented with at the time of His passion. Behold an excellent pattern for us to copy after, and a lesson that is sufficient to confound many Christians of our days, who scarce allow themselves a passing reflection on the goodness of their bountiful Creator, when they sit down to their meals, and who show so much delicacy in the choice of their food, and commit such excess in the use of it, that they defeat the very purposes for which nourishment should be taken, by impairing the health which it was designed to preserve.

Another instruction our Saviour gives us in the Gospel of this day is, to feed the poor with the leavings of our tables. He ordered His Disci-

ples to gather the fragments that remained, as the Evangelist informs us, after they had eaten of the food miraculously multiplied, to give the rich to understand that the poor ought to be fed and supported with the superfluities of their tables. This is not only their duty but their interest, for *the alms which they hide in the bosom of the poor*, will accompany them to the bar of divine justice, and stand *their best friends in the day of need*; when all other things fail them, the charities they have distributed will plead their cause, and the distressed objects they have relieved will intercede for them like so many powerful advocates before the throne of God, and procure them admittance into the eternal tabernacles of bliss. Hence our Blessed Saviour desires us *make to ourselves friends of the mammon of iniquity*, and to gain over the poor on our side by plentiful alms. Hence also the Royal Prophet says (Ps. xl.): *Blessed is the man who considers the necessities of the poor, and relieves them; the Lord will treat him mildly and sweetly in the evil day.* The Sovereign Judge of the living and the dead will then regard whatever charities are extended for His sake to His little ones here on earth as given to Himself, and reward them accordingly. On the contrary, whatever is uncharitably refused to His little ones in the hour of their distress, He will look upon as refused to Himself in person; He will then shut the bowels of His infinite mercy against those who shut the bowels of their charity and compassion against their necessitous brethren, who bear the image and character of His divinity. It was for this reason that the rich glutton mentioned in the Gospel *was buried in hell*; he was cast into eternal flames, and refused a drop of cold water to cool his tongue, because he had refused the crumbs that fell from his table to poor Lazarus, who was perishing at his gate with hunger, whilst he was feasting sumptuously, and enjoying the comforts and pleasures of life with the accomplices of his debauchery. His misfortune ought to be a warning to us all, not only to be merciful and charitable to the poor according to our abilities, but also to lead a sober and temperate life.

As to the sin of drunkenness, it would be a difficult task to sum up all the evils that it is productive of, or to relate the long train of misfortunes that flow from this poisonous source. Not to speak of the scandal that the drunkard gives, by living a reproach to his religion and a disgrace to Christianity, there is no vice that degrades him more from the honor of human nature, or that renders him more universally contemptible; there is no crime that reduces him nearer to the low rank,

base condition, and similitude of the beasts of the field ; nay, he exceeds them in brutality, for they do not fall into such infamous excesses, and if they are not temperate by reason and by virtue, they are so at least by an instinct of nature ; but the drunkard is neither conducted by this instinct, nor does he govern himself according to the dictates of right reason, and consequently he is not temperate either one way or the other. Ungrateful to his Creator, who vouchsafed to distinguish him by the noble faculty of reason, he debases himself to the last degree ; he clouds his understanding, confuses his judgment, stupifies his mind, and renders himself unfit for every religious duty, and fit for nothing but the drudgery of the devil. Moreover, the drunkard shortens his own days, and murders himself by inches ; for excessive drinking, particularly of raw drams and intoxicating spirits, impairs the health, and brings on a thousand dreadful disorders which emaciate the body, overthrow the most excellent constitution, and gradually put a period to its existence. Hence some learned writers of the medical faculty do not hesitate to assert, that the drinking of spirituous liquors has killed as many thousands as there are stars in the sky, and that more have died by this slow but sure poison than by any other kind of poison whatsoever ; for which reason they tell us that the following epitaph might be justly inscribed on the tomb of every notorious drunkard : *Here lies a self-murderer*. What then must we think of the unhappy man or woman, who, for some successive years, is taking the utmost pains to accomplish such a desperate act of suicide, and to anticipate the period of his or her existence ? St. Paul replies, that such persons entail damnation on their souls, and that they shall be cut off from the inheritance of the kingdom of God—Galat. v. 21. What, alas ! have such people therefore to expect, when a sudden death seizes them in a state of intoxication, in the very act of mortal sin, but the eternal torments of hell, which are due to final impenitence !

O, my brethren, let me entreat you, by the bowels of Jesus Christ, to beware of such dreadful evils. Harken to the voice of the Apostle, Rom. xiii. Harken to these words, which formerly made a deep impression on the mind of St. Augustine, and contributed to his conversion : *Let us cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light. Let us walk honestly as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities, not in contention and envy : but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscences*. Give us grace, O Lord, to practice the rules and

maxims of the Gospel. Grant that we may be sober and temperate at all our repasts. Grant that we may not abuse Thy gifts and blessings to our own destruction. Preserve us from ever falling into any criminal excesses. Strengthen us against all temptations, and make us truly sensible of the dangers which are before us, that we may avoid the snares of our mortal enemy, who, *like a roaring lion is seeking an opportunity to devour us*, and that we may secure to ourselves such a portion of Thy grace, as will entitle us to partake one day of the eternal banquet of Thy glory. Which I wish you all, my brethren, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON THE NECESSITY OF AN OPERATIVE FAITH, ACCOMPANIED WITH GOOD WORKS, AND THE PRACTICE OF CHRISTIAN VIRTUES.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. Faith with good works, and faith without good works.
- II. The injury and provocation of faith without good works to the Almighty.*
- III. Its deadly effects to the sinner.
- IV. Terrible examples of punishment in those who had faith without good works.

Omnis arbor, quæ non facit fructum bonum, excidetur, et in ignem mittetur.

St. Matt c. vii. v. 19.

Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, shall be cut down, and shall be cast into the fire.

St. Matt. c. vii. v. 19.

THE moral sense of these words of this day's Gospel is plain and obvious. It is evident that the fate of Christianity is hereby emblemed and pointed out. Not only the tree that brings forth bad fruit shall be condemned to the flames, but this also shall be the fate of the barren tree on which no good fruit is found ; that is to say, not only those who live openly engaged in the practice of vice shall receive the sentence of eternal fire, but likewise the indolent Christian who does not produce the real fruits of solid virtue and good works. A mere speculative or abstractive faith will not save him ; for the true saving faith is active and operative. It *worketh by charity* and the practice of Christian

virtues—Gal. v. 6. The advantages of faith are indeed great in themselves, but, as St. James remarks, they will avail us but little without good works. To be justified in the sight of God, two conditions are essentially necessary—faith and obedience ; that is, we must not only believe what Christ has taught, but we must also obey what He has commanded. Our actions must agree with our belief, and our lives must correspond with the purity of the faith we profess. As Catholics you are fully persuaded hereof, my brethren ; you know that it is by a practical and active faith that *the just man lives*, and hopes to reap the benefit of Christ's redemption, who expressly says in the Gospel of this day : *Not every one who saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven ; but he who doth the will of my Father, who is in Heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven.* Yet how few are there to be found who practice what they believe, and live up to the holy law and will of God ! There are millions who firmly believe all that he has revealed, but how few are there, comparatively speaking, who perform what He has commanded ! What a shameful contradiction is there not between their faith and their morals ! What monsters of impiety, cries out St. Jerome, do we not behold in the very midst of Christianity ! This monstrous contradiction between faith and practice, so deplorable in itself, and still so general in the world, shall be the subject of the following discourse. In the first point, I will show you how injurious and provoking it is to the Almighty ; and in the second, how prejudicial and fatal it is to the sinner. Let us previously implore the assistance of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, whom the angel greeted with these words, *Ave Maria.*

When the Church in her infancy was opposed by the incredulity and obstinacy of the Jews, she gloriously triumphed by the zeal and miracles of her Apostles ; when she was attacked by the infidelity of the Gentiles, she became victorious by the courage and constancy of her martyrs ; when heresiarchs and sectaries attempted to corrupt and adulterate the purity of her faith, she refuted their erroneous tenets by the wisdom and erudition of her doctors, and by the decisions of her general councils ; but she has not yet been happy enough to subdue the vicious and disorderly conduct of numbers of her own refractory children and rotten members, who persecute her faith most shamefully by their wicked and scandalous lives. She has not yet triumphed over the perverseness of those half Christians and half Catholics who believe one way and live another. Their immorality is an evil that still subsists to this very day,

and openly contradicts her doctrine, slights her salutary admonitions, overlooks her menaces and anathemas, and resists the force of grace and all the good examples of the virtuous. To compare their conduct with the rules of Christianity, one would be apt to infer that the world is the only god they adore, the only sovereign whose laws they revere. Regardless of the advantages of future happiness, they appear to be totally attached to the happiness of this life, and to be influenced only by temporal views in almost all their actions. Yet they will tell you their sentiments are perfectly orthodox, and that they do not doubt of any revealed truth. But who can give credit to their declarations when their actions contradict and give the lie to their words ! How can they be supposed to believe, for example, that unspeakable misery in the flames of hell will be the punishment of the wicked, and that inexpressible happiness in the kingdom of Heaven will be the reward of the virtuous, when they abandon themselves with so much facility to vice, and sleep with so much tranquillity in the arms of perdition ! How can they be supposed to be convinced of the enormity and dismal effects of mortal sin, when they commit it with so little remorse, and expose themselves to the manifest danger of perishing eternally, by continuing whole years together in that unhappy state !

But let us suppose that they are not incredulous, and that they have not lost their faith. They are still inexcusable for acting contrary to it, and the irregularity so visible in their lives is what cannot be sufficiently lamented. Were they but directed by their faith, sin would appear unmasked in its real deformity, virtue only would seem amiable, and the vain show of transitory allurements which the world displays to their view would soon vanish like a phantom. Their faith would tell them that by every mortal sin they are guilty of they lose God and His grace, the merits of their past good works, and the glory of heaven. Their faith would set before their eyes a frightful picture of the last judgment, and of the abyss of devouring flames which the anger of God has kindled for the purpose of tormenting impenitent sinners for never-ending eternity. It would move them to a speedy and sincere repentance, as being the only remedy that can preserve them from the impending dangers that threaten their souls ; it would, like the soul in the human body, animate all their actions, rouse and influence their desires, and inspire them with courage and resolution to surmount every difficulty that occurs in the practice of virtue. Such were the fruits that faith produced in the primitive ages of Christianity,

and such likewise are the fruits that it would be productive of in our days, were we but directed by it, and did we but make it the invariable rule of our conduct ; but, alas ! the generality of modern Christians, instead of living conformably to the dictates of religion, and regulating their actions according to the principles of their faith, reject and contradict in their practice the sacred truths which they profess with their mouths. Nothing is more holy than their belief, nothing more disorderly than their behavior. They believe like saints, but live like infidels ; nay, they often surpass even the very pagans themselves in criminal excesses ; their voice is like the voice of Jacob, as the Scripture speaks, but their hands—that is to say, their works and actions—are like those of Esau. They are Christians and Catholics in theory and speculation, and appear to be no better than Turks and Mahometans in practice. How many nominal Christians of this kind are to be met with, even within the precincts of this city and its liberties ? They admit the necessity of good works to salvation, and yet they live as if they believed that they may be saved by faith alone, without doing any good works ; nay, as if they expected to go to heaven, by running on blindly in the broad road that leads to hell and eternal perdition, and scarce ever giving any other proof of their believing in the existence of one God and Three Persons, but when they abuse the blessed name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost by the most horrid oaths, imprecations, and blasphemies.

As Catholics and disciples of Christ, our lives should be copies of that divine original, and our actions should be a public declaration of the sanctity of our profession. Our faith, so venerable for its antiquity, so amiable for its purity, so solidly grounded and confirmed by a cloud of miracles, should rouse our hopes, inflame our desires, and animate us to *make our vocation and election sure by the practice of good works*—2 Ep. St. Peter, i. 10. It should excite us to vindicate the honor of God, prove the truth of His doctrine, contribute to the conversion of sinners, and confound the false maxims of the world by an edifying behavior. St. Paul established this great maxim amongst the Romans as an invariable rule of their conduct, when he said in general, without exception of persons, *Let every one of you please his neighbor unto good, to edification*—xv. 2. Hence if we look back toward the infancy of the Church, we shall behold with pleasure the primitive Christians converting a pagan world by the sanctity of their example, and diffusing the good odor of Christ on all sides by the purity of their morals and the practice of every heroic and divine virtue which their actions

breathed. Armed with the shield of faith, and inflamed by the great truths which it represented to them, their constancy was not to be shaken by all the rage of the most cruel tyrants. Their fidelity was tried like gold in the furnace. The violence of torments and the power of delusive charms were employed to compel them to apostatize or renounce some part of their religious creed, but in vain ; for in proportion as they were slain by the persecuting sword their number increased and multiplied, so as to give occasion to Tertullian to say, that *the blood of martyrs became a fertile seed of new Christians*. Did we, my brethren, but honor our faith as they did, by our morals and by an exact conformity between what we believe and what we practice, our exemplary lives would not only make our holy religion appear in its native lustre and genuine beauty, but would also be an effectual means to bring about the conversion of numbers of souls. Our separated brethren would no longer view our principles in the unfavorable light they usually do ; they would be disabused, undeceived, and edified. But the monstrous opposition they observe between the belief and practice of wicked Catholics scandalizes them to the highest degree and contributes to increase their prejudices, to multiply their mistaken notions, to remove them farther from the truth, and to destroy in their hearts all the good dispositions they might otherwise have. I leave yourselves now to judge how injurious this must be to the cause of religion, and how provoking to the Almighty. *Woe be to them*, says the Gospel, *who are the cause of such scandal*, and who, by their bad example, hinder the conversion of their neighbor ! *Woe be to them* who draw so many bitter reproaches on the Church of God, by the shameful inconsistency that appears between their conduct and their belief ! St. Augustine does not hesitate to call them the greatest enemies of Christianity, and the most dangerous persecutors of the Church, inasmuch as through them the name of God is blasphemed among unbelievers, the sacred mysteries of religion are exposed to raillery and open contempt, and many foul aspersions are undeservedly thrown upon our doctrine, as if it countenanced and authorized the vicious practices of some of our refractory and rotten members. They may, perhaps, feed themselves at present with chimerical hopes ; but the day will come when they shall be convinced by fatal experience, that the faith which they profess with their mouths, but deny by their actions, instead of saving them will serve for the rule of their condemnation, and render them liable to greater punishment. This reflection leads me to my second point.

Scarce was the Church of Christ established when an error was broached, setting forth that how irregular soever were the lives of men it sufficed for salvation if they believed as Christians. The Nicolaites, and the disciples of Simon, the magician, were the first who declared for this impious dogma. Never, perhaps, was there any heresy less plausible than this; for what probability could there be that the Incarnate Wisdom, the Son of the Eternal Father, came only on earth to found a religion in favor of libertinism, and to indulge mankind in their criminal disorders, with the hopes of impunity, provided they but believed in Him. The glaring absurdity of this erroneous tenet conveys with it its own condemnation; however, the Scripture is very explicit on this head in sundry places. It expressly declares, that *every tree that does not bring forth good fruit shall be cut down, and cast into the fire*. St. James says, that *as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead*—ii. 26. St. Paul says, that *in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith that worketh by charity* (Gal. v.): and again (1 Cor. xiii.), *though I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing*. The unhappy fate of the slothful servant, who was doomed to the same place of darkness with the unfaithful servant, shows also that God will comprehend in the same condemnation those Christians who neglect to improve the talents intrusted to their care, and those who abuse and misapply them. In like manner, the parable of the five foolish virgins who were rejected, not for any intrigues or malpractices, but because they neglected to furnish their lamps with the oil of charity and good works, is a proof, not only of the necessity of being exempt from the gross and scandalous vices of the world, and leading a moral, honest life, as thousands of infidels do, but also of the obligation we are under to distinguish ourselves by the practice of Christian virtues, and to excite our neighbor, by the shining light of our good example, to glorify our Father in heaven. In the account also that the Gospel gives us of the last judgment, when the Sovereign Judge *will render to every man according to his works*, as St. Paul says (Rom. ii. 6), no other cause is assigned for the damnation of the reprobate but the neglect and omission of good works.

What will then become of wicked Christians and Catholics who live in the open practice of vice, and disgrace the august character they received in baptism by their immoralities and scandalous behavior! What will be the fate of those who, being enlightened by the rays of

the Gospel, and abundantly favored with the gifts of Heaven, only abuse the graces they have received, and provoke the justice of God by the malice of their crying sins ! Have they not reason to expect a more severe sentence, and a more dreadful punishment than pagans and infidels, who sin through ignorance, since they are incomparably more criminal and more ungrateful, as they have received more signal favors and blessings from Heaven ? St. Peter says (2 Ep., ii.), that it would be better for them to have remained in the darkness of infidelity, and never to have come to the knowledge of God's holy law, than to resist and transgress the truth after knowing and embracing it ; for this will serve to enhance their guilt and subject them to a more severe punishment. The Ninivites, who did penance at the preaching of the Prophet Jonas, shall rise up in judgment against them, as the Gospel speaks, Matt. xii. 41. And the inhabitants of Sodom and Ghomorrah shall meet with a more favorable judgment on the last day—Matt. xi. 24. Nay, even in this life, their ingratitude and perverseness often draw down the dire effects of God's wrath and indignation on their criminal heads ; for when the measure of their iniquities is filled up, and the time of forbearance is over, the ax is laid to the root, and they are treated like the barren fig-tree mentioned in St. Luke, xiii., which encumbered the ground to no purpose, and therefore fell under a dreadful malediction. They are deprived of the gracious favors and heavenly succors which they slight and abuse ; they are left to themselves, and to the corruption of their own hearts ; they are delivered over to a reprobate sense, and abandoned, like the vineyard spoken of in Isaias v., which was given up to be plundered and trodden under foot like a desert, because it produced nothing but wild grapes and brambles, briars, and thorns, though it had been cultivated with much care and assiduity, and copiously watered with those gentle showers that descend from the clouds. We have a sad instance of this terrifying truth in the Jews, who were once the favorite vineyard of the Lord of Israel, but are now above sixteen centuries abandoned and forsaken, dispersed through the world, and branded with infamy. The sentence that was announced by the Prophet Isaias has been literally verified in them, in just punishment of their ingratitude and contempt of the laws of God. They abused His mercy, and therefore they now experience the severity of his justice ; they neglected to produce the good fruits He expected from them, and are therefore deprived of that special providence which was their safeguard and protection. The kingdom of God, and those heavenly suc-

cors which they would not profit of, have been withdrawn from them and given to other nations. The light of the Gospel has crossed the Atlantic Ocean, and darted its beams to the New World in South and North America, and to the very corners of the East and West Indies ; it has penetrated to the most barbarous parts of the earth, and one single ray of it has not as yet enlightened that stiff-necked people. This example of God's avenging justice should teach all sinners to learn wisdom at their expense, and to profit by their disgrace ; it should be a warning to Christians and Catholics to be more attentive to their religious duties, and to beware of provoking Heaven to punish them in like manner, by a subtraction of its gracious favors and blessings, and by depriving them in its wrath of the great advantages and benefits of the true saving faith, as has happened to many extensive nations where the Christian religion heretofore flourished with great splendor. What has become of Greece, once the seminary of learning and the nursery of piety ? What has become of Egypt, heretofore inhabited by twenty-seven millions of Christians ! What has become of so many other kingdoms and provinces in Asia Minor and in Africa ! Those vast regions which enriched the Church with Cyprians, Augustines, Jeromes, Chrysostoms, Brasils, Gregories, and numberless other illustrious doctors and saints, are no longer watered with the dew of divine grace. They have become the seats of infidelity and irreligion ; they are overspread with the darkness of paganism. O, my brethren, how deplorable would our condition be were we so unfortunate as to experience the severity of God's justice in this respect, and to be treated in like manner in punishment of our sins ? O, merciful Jesus, preserve us from this misfortune ; remove all scandals from Thy Church, and give us grace to become worthy members of so illustrious a body. O may those unquenchable flames which are prepared for the fruitless tree, for the slothful and indolent servant, rouse our sluggish souls from the lethargic sleep of tepidity and indolence, and excite us to improve the talents and graces we have received to Thy honor and glory, and to the edification of our neighbor. Grant us, we beseech Thee, a lively, active, and practical faith, animated with charity and accompanied with good works, that by living here in a manner worthy of our vocation and profession, we may have the happiness to see and enjoy Thee hereafter in the kingdom of Heaven. Which I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON CORRESPONDING WITH THE GRACE OF GOD.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. Explanation of the Gospel.
- II. Those who do not comply with the graces of God shall be deprived of them.
- III. God gives his graces to those who comply with them.
- IV. An appeal to sinners to comply with the graces of God.

Redde rationem villicationis tuæ.—St. Luc. c. xvi. v. 2.

Give an account of thy stewardship.—St. Luke, c. xvi. v. 2.

THE subject of this day's Gospel is the parable of the unjust steward, who, being accused of having wasted his master's goods, was called upon to give an account of his stewardship, and who, therefore, managed his affairs with such ingenuity, and settled his accounts so artfully, that he was continued in his employment, and gained his master's applause, not for his fraudulent and unjust proceedings, but for the prudent expedients and cautious measures he adopted and contrived, in order to prevent his own ruin, and avert the danger of being dismissed from his office with disgrace, and reduced either to beggary or to very hard labor, which he found himself unequal to. This parable gives us to understand that we are all stewards of the Almighty God, and that there is a day of reckoning to come, on which we must appear before His awful tribunal to give a strict account of our stewardship, and to show in what manner we have corresponded with His graces, managed His gifts, and employed His favors and blessings. A diligent inquiry will then be made, whether we have improved the talents intrusted to our care for God's honor and glory and the benefit of our neighbor, or buried them under ground, like the indolent servant, or misapplied them to answer the inordinate cravings of self-love, pride, and vanity. The most effectual means you can devise, my brethren, to avert the wrath of Heaven, and gain the friendship of the Sovereign Judge on that great accounting day, is to make good use at present of the gracious favors and blessings that are conferred on you, in order to enable you to accomplish the grand and important affairs of your salvation. If you abuse and reject them, if you reap no benefit or advantage from them, but render them unprofitable, you have reason to apprehend that your ingratitude will

draw down on you the most formidable vengeance of Heaven, and provoke the Lord your God to withdraw from you those graces which you slight and despise, and give them to others who will profit by them, according to these words which Jesus Christ formerly said to the Jews : *The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and shall be given to a nation yielding the fruits thereof*—Matt. xxi. 43. To engage you, then, to correspond faithfully with the graces of God is the design of the following discourse. If you continue to render unprofitable the graces of God, He will deprive you of them. This is my first point. He will give them to others who will profit by them. This is the second point, and the whole subject of your favorable attention. Let us previously implore the light of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin. *Ave Maria.*

St. Paul, in his epistle to the Romans (i. 18), informs us of the dreadful punishment that God inflicts on those who abuse His graces ; for he says : *The wrath of God is revealed from Heaven upon all impiety, and upon the iniquity of those men who detain the truth of God in iniquity ;* that is, on all those who receive His grace, and reap no benefit by it, and who detain in an unjust captivity all those grand truths which He has been pleased to make known to them. But what is the *wrath of God* that falls on the heads of those who abuse His graces and despise His goodness ? Is it that He commands heaven and earth and all the elements to arm and revenge the contempt of His favors ? No, my brethren ; for since such chastisements could only punish that which is the least culpable in man, and affect the body alone without touching the soul, it is not in this sensible manner that the anger of God is always made manifest. But as it is the most tender proof of His infinite bounty toward sinners to go in search of them in the midst of their criminal engagements ; to speak to them in the bottom of the heart ; to press, invite, and solicit them to return to their duty ; so it is the greatest mark of His wrath and justice to abandon them, to retire from them, and speak to them no more. It was this dreadful chastisement that David so much apprehended when he prayed thus to the Lord (Ps. xlix.) : *O my God be not silent ; let your sacred voice still echo in the bottom of my soul.* It was this punishment that the Almighty heretofore so often threatened by His Prophets to inflict on His people : *I have spoken, I have raised my voice to press and conjure you to return to me, but you have been deaf to all my loving invitations, wherefore, I shall in my turn be silent.* I shall no more

disturb your false, your fatal repose, which will end in your eternal ruin, in death everlasting. Thus it is that God threatens to manifest His wrath to sinners who are unfaithful to His graces. *We have taken care of Babylon*, says the Lord (Jerem. li. 9), *and Babylon is not cured ; let us abandon it, and have its welfare no longer at heart*. It is true, indeed, God does not abandon us, unless we first abandon Him, as St. Augustine says. He is undoubtedly a God full of mercy and bounty, for those who attentively listen to His calls and faithfully correspond with His graces ; but He is armed with wrath and vengeance against those who despise His goodness, are deaf to His inspirations, and reject His invitations. For this reason Christ assures us in the Gospel that the servant who has received but little, and has profited by this little, that more shall be given to him ; but that he who has buried his talent, this talent shall be taken from him, and he himself as an unprofitable servant, shall be cast into exterior darkness, where there will be perpetual weeping and gnashing of teeth. This, alas ! will be the fate of the unhappy soul that slights and abandons God, and in its turn is abandoned by Him. It will fall from sin into sin, from crime into crime, without being sensible of the misery of its unhappy condition ; or, if sensible, it will still flatter itself with the pleasing hopes that it will one day renounce its criminal engagements. In the interim, God in His anger suffers it to be deceived by this pernicious illusion, and to fall into a spiritual lethargy, which insensibly conducts it into endless misery. He permits it to be overpowered with a fatal blindness, and to sleep peaceably in the arms of perdition without disturbing its repose, until it awakes to feel the rigor of His justice in hell. Such is the order of His providence, that when the sinner has filled up the measure of his iniquities, and deserves to perish, God withdraws those powerful and those efficacious graces which would not only enlighten his understanding to see the horror of his condition, but would also inflame his will with an ardent desire, and with a generous resolution to overcome all these obstacles that oppose his conversion ; and the subtraction of these graces is the most formidable punishment that the Almighty can inflict on him in this life, because nothing removes the sinner farther from his last end, which is eternal salvation ; and consequently, nothing makes him approach nearer the greatest of all misfortunes, eternal damnation ; since without these graces he never will be saved. Moreover, this subtraction of grace hardens the sinner, and makes him grow obdurate in his unhappy state. He no longer discovers the deadly

poison and fatal effects of sin, but becomes enamored of it; he dotes on the pleasing object that gratifies his passions, and is captivated by its engaging aspect; for when grace ceases to shine on the eyes of his soul, and to display the grand ideas of a just and avenging God, of a judgment without mercy, of a sentence without appeal, of a miserable eternity, he is deprived of those interior lights by means of which he might be alarmed and terrified, and might discern how odious and frightful sin is in itself, and be roused to have recourse to a remedy, and use his best endeavors to rise out of the deplorable state to which he is unfortunately reduced. On the other hand, he is allured and attracted by the false and deceitful charms of sin, and by his inordinate affection to it he justly forfeits his right to heaven, and loses his soul for all eternity. Nay, this subtraction of grace is a punishment which the Almighty not only inflicts on those declared libertines who make open profession of violating His laws, and who rejoice and glory in their criminal excesses, but also on those who lead an idle, inactive, unprofitable life, without performing any good works; for why should the Almighty bestow His favors on us, if we are unwilling to profit by them? Is it not to reject and profane His graces, not to employ them for the end which they were designed for? The fruitless fig-tree, mentioned in the Gospel, was struck with an anathema because it bore no fruit; the barren land was cursed because it yielded not grain in abundance: the servant was condemned, and lost the talent he had received, because he did not make the proper use of it. Such is the punishment which God inflicts on those who do not correspond with His favors; it is thus they are cursed, anathematized, and abandoned by Heaven, who reject His graces, who despise, insult, and outrage His goodness, and who, notwithstanding His many efforts to withdraw them from their criminal engagements, persist obstinate in vice, closing their ears to all His charitable admonitions, and refusing for whole years together to listen to His fatherly entreaties. Were they but obedient and submissive to His voice, His providence would never abandon them, His eyes would be constantly fixed upon them to watch for their security and defense; all His treasures would be open for them, and His bounty would engage Him still to heap new favors on them. But it is most just that He should at length despise them as they have despised Him; that He should be hardened against them as their heart has been so long hardened against Him, and that He should punish the so often repeated abuses of His heavenly favors. It is thus, in fine, my brethren, that those obdurate souls perish, who,

after having often rejected the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, fall from small sins into great, from sins often reiterated into a deplorable habit, from this habit into a kind of necessity, from this necessity into contempt and obduracy, from obduracy into despair, from despair into hell, and when they are buried in these mansions of misery, it is then that God will no longer have compassion on them. Burn, unhappy sinners, burn ; cry, lament, roll yourselves in this devouring fire ; God will never more look on you with the eyes of pity ; He never will commiserate your distressed condition. There are so many ages that Cain burns in these flames, so many ages that the Sodomites suffer. God beholds their unspeakable torments without pity ; His anger is never to be appeased ; His justice is to be for ever inflexible, inexorable. Can you then, my brethren, after such instances of the formidable judgments of God, can you any longer continue to despise His goodness, to reject His graces, to resist His inspirations ? If you do, He will withdraw His graces from you in this world, as a prelude to that eternal punishment which awaits obstinate sinners in the next, as you have already heard, and these graces He will bestow on others, who will profit by them. This leads me to my second point.

It is a received maxim in philosophy that God and nature do nothing in vain, and of course grace, which is one of the most noble productions of the Almighty, never remains unprofitable. But you will ask me : Do not many sinners reject grace, and with regard to these, is it not absolutely unprofitable, as they benefit nothing by it ? It is true ; but this grace will not be lost ; this sinner is not willing to profit by it ; it will be given to another who will receive it, and make the proper use of it. This is a truth which we learn from the following parable, mentioned in the Gospel of St. Luke, xiv. A certain nobleman made a great feast, and invited many ; but all these, unwilling to answer the invitation, desired to be excused : the nobleman immediately ordered his servant to go forth into the streets and lanes of the city to gather up all he met, and to bring in the poor, the lame, and the blind ; and the servant said : *Lord it is done, as thou didst command, and yet there is place ;* wherefore the Lord said to the servant, *Go forth into the highways and hedges, and compel them to enter, that my house may be filled.*

This parable, my brethren, is an emblem or figure of what happens with regard to the eternal banquet of glory prepared in the kingdom of Heaven. God invites all mankind to this great feast, and in particular all Christians ; He calls them interiorly by His secret inspirations, by

the movements of His grace, and exteriorly by the preachers, teachers, and pastors of His Church, who speak to them on His part, and in His name. Many despise these calls, these kind invitations of their sovereign benefactor, and by this contempt seal their eternal reprobation ; others are called in their stead, who, profiting by their downfall, cheerfully embrace the offer, faithfully correspond with the graces of God, and are thereby admitted to that eternal feast which He has prepared in the kingdom of Heaven for those who constantly love and serve Him. It is then an unquestionable truth that the Almighty withdraws His graces from those who despise them, to bestow them on others who are to make the proper use of them. Nay, it is a truth, which has been long since verified in the Jews, reproved by Heaven for the abuse of its favors, and in the Gentiles, who profited by their reprobation, and were adopted and substituted in their place. If then, the Almighty has numberless graces, it is not to reserve them to Himself, but to communicate them. He requires but proper subjects to bestow on them these supernatural blessings, and He withdraws them from such as are so unhappy as to abuse them, in order to give them to others who will make proper use of them. Beware then, O sinner, of presuming on the bounty of your God as you frequently do, even so far as to persevere in your criminal disorders, because you have a good God to deal with. Beware, I say, of flattering yourself into such a false security, and saying to yourself, God is too merciful to suffer me to perish for ever ; for though you should be so unhappy as to perish for ever, God will not be the less merciful for that. His mercy still will find its account in the distribution of His favors, and it will lose nothing though you are eternally damned, because others will be saved in your stead. It is true, mercy in this supposition will not be exerted in favor of you, but it will be exerted in favor of another, who will take your place, and obtain that crown of glory which was designed for you in heaven. Hence the Holy Ghost gives you this important advice, which you should be always careful to reduce to practice : *Be diligent to retain what ye have, fearing lest another should take that crown which has been prepared for you*—Apocal. xi. Whatever degree, then, of sanctity or perfection you imagine you have acquired, still beware not to harbor too great an opinion of yourselves, and still much more not to despise others ; for you are not confirmed in grace, nor those whom you despise, in final impenitence. You know not what is to be their lot, nor what will be your own fate. The judgments of God are formidable ;

they are abysses which human understanding cannot fathom. He is often pleased to exalt the humble and humble the proud ; to exalt the humble as high as the highest heavens, and humble the proud as low as the bottom of hell. The deplorable downfall of many who soared almost to the highest degree of sanctity, and are now eternally damned, with all their pretended merits, is a glaring but terrifying proof of this truth. Whoever you therefore are, whether just or sinners, these grand truths concern you, and you should draw from them consequences which may be of advantage to your souls. If you are just, beware not to conceive too high an opinion of yourselves. Perhaps you will be one day rejected like Saul, and that sinner who now appears so infamous in your eyes will, like another David, be raised to the same throne with the princes of the people of God. Perhaps you will take the place of Judas, and he that of St. Matthew, for virtue and grace are not inseparably annexed to any person, to any state or condition. No one then should presume on his own merits, or on the sanctity of his profession. All this has availed nothing to the Jews, who are by adoption the people and children of God, and the heirs of His kingdom ; and these advantages they unhappily forfeited, because they made not the proper use of them. Such are the dreadful consequences of abusing the favors of Heaven. This is what should make even the most virtuous work their salvation in holy fear and trembling, lest the grace of God be withdrawn from them in punishment of their despising, slighting, neglecting, and, what is worse, frequently resisting it. Is not this contempt, this neglect, this resistance, the sad cause of the many frailties which are often visible even amongst those who are remarkable for piety and religion ? How many do we see daily shipwrecked on their voyage to eternity ! How many have lost in one moment the chastity and probity of several years ! How many Christian heroes, who for the greatest part of their lives were exemplary for their piety, have at length miserably fallen, and are now lost for all eternity ! They were, notwithstanding, the children of the kingdom, but now they find it verified by woeful experience, that *the children of the kingdom shall be cast into exterior darkness*, as the Gospel expresses it, *where there will be perpetual weeping and gnashing of teeth*. Had they but persevered a little longer in the practice of virtue, and corresponded with the favors offered to them, crowns of glory were ready to fall on their heads, and inexpressible bliss would have been the reward of their fidelity to God's graces ; but one unlucky hour blasted all their hopes, frustrated all their expectations, and

their reprobation became an occasion of salvation to others, to whom the advantages they were, possessed of have been transferred ; *for the kingdom of God is taken from some, and given to others, who yield the fruits of it.* This should excite the vigilance of the just, and engage them to be ever careful in corresponding with the favors of Heaven, since, though they are just to-day, they may be sinners to-morrow ; though this day saints, to-morrow they may be in the state of damnation.

As for you, sinners, who have been long deaf to the calls of God, and for a series of years immersed in the mire of sin and sensuality, be not discouraged or dismayed ; the Almighty has still, perhaps, some graces in reserve and in store for you. Idolatrous nations have heretofore come to the knowledge of the true religion ; morals the most corrupt have been changed, habits the most inveterate have been conquered, vices the most odious and abominable have been effaced ; monsters of impiety have become patterns of virtue. Do not then despair, like unhappy Cain, or look on your salvation as impossible. Millions precipitate themselves into the bottomless abyss and perish for all eternity on account of their infidelity to the graces that are offered to them. You may derive an advantage from their misfortune, and profit by this favorable opportunity ; they lose the crowns of glory which were designed for them ; you may gain these crowns if you please. There is not any one amongst you so wicked or abandoned but may still be reclaimed by the help of divine grace ; there is not one of you but may still equal or surpass the most virtuous souls you see on earth in virtue and merits. If you ascend in thought into heaven and take a view of the blessed, you will see many among them who were heretofore notorious sinners. They are enjoying their God in the mansions of bliss, whilst the children of the kingdom groan and lament in exterior darkness. - Remember that Jesus Christ Himself has declared in the Gospel, that publicans and prostitutes would take the places of the most regular amongst the Scribes and Pharisees in the kingdom of Heaven. St. Matthew experienced this truth : from a publican he became an Apostle ; St. Paul, from a blasphemer and persecutor of the Church, became a doctor of nations, a vessel of election, a prodigy of grace and sanctity ; and Magdalen, though a woman of bad fame, surpassed even virgins in virtue and merits.

Begin, then, sinners, to labor strenuously in the grand affair of your salvation. Let not the difficulty of the enterprise deter you. Consider

what a fund you have to depend on, what a support ! So many graces, which a numberless multitude of reprobate sinners have abused, they are for you, if you are willing to accept of them. Ask for them in the name of Jesus, and your God will grant them ; nay, He does not always wait to be asked. Does He not often wait and strike at the door of your hearts to gain admittance into your souls ? At present He invites you to return and give yourselves up to Him ; He prevents you, He seeks you, He presses you to throw yourselves into the arms of His mercy. Resolve then, from this day, from this moment, no longer to reject the favors of Heaven, no longer to tear open these sacred wounds of your crucified Jesus, which have already poured forth streams of blood to wash away all your horrid crimes. Cry out from the bottom of your hearts : *O my God, we are now determined never more to be deaf* to Thy calls, never more to reject Thy loving invitations, never more to abuse Thy gracious favors and blessings. Strengthen, O Lord, this, our good resolution, and grant that, by co-operating faithfully with Thy grace here on earth, we may, as the reward of our fidelity, see and enjoy Thee hereafter in the kingdom of Heaven. Which I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

JESUS WEeping OVER JERUSALEM, &c.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. The fate of Jerusalem.
- II. Application of the Gospel of the day to a sinful soul, and analogy of rebellious Jerusalem to a human spirit in rebellion against Almighty God.
- III. An exhortation to hardened hearts.

Videns Jesus Jerusalem flevit super illam.—*St. Luc c. xix. v. 41.*

Jesus seeing the city of Jerusalem, he wept over it.—*St. Luke, c. xix. v. 41.*

THE misery and insensibility of mankind have always been the subject of the tears and tenderness of Jesus Christ. No sooner had He blessed the world with His nativity, but His infant cries proclaimed Him the pledge of sinners ; nor was the tomb of Lazarus adorned with the heavenly drops which trickled from His sacred eyes, but as it exhibited the corruption and perverseness of sinners ; and if His heart overflows

with grief at the sight of Jerusalem, it is because that city had no foresight of her future misery, and refused the present graces which were offered to it. But if the Jews, deaf to every holy inspiration, and insensible of the calamities that were to ensue, have been reprov'd and abandoned by God, because they neglected the different times in which He favored them with His blessings, it is our business at present to become wise at their expense, and, by opposing virtue to vice, establish a lasting felicity on the ruins of their slighted glory. It is our duty and interest to improve and manage well the precious moments of our visitation, and beware of neglecting the favorable opportunities which the Father of Mercies is pleased to offer us to work our salvation. This is what Christian prudence dictates and whispers to our hearts. We should consider attentively that the disaster of Jerusalem was but a faint shadow of the eternal punishments that are reserved for obstinate and impenitent sinners in the next life, and therefore, if we have our eternal welfare at heart, it is incumbent on us, whilst the sun of grace and mercy shines, to mingle our tears with the tears of Jesus Christ, and lament our past sins in the bitterness of our souls. O that I could be so happy as to excite in you all this day the like spirit of compunction ! It is what I shall attempt, by laying before you a plain exposition of the Gospel, and showing you how deplorable is the state of all impenitent sinners groaning under the weight of mortal sin, and what fatal consequences they expose themselves to by rejecting the graces of God. Enable me, O Holy Ghost, to expatiate on this important subject to thy honor and glory, and to the edification of the faithful assembled here in thy name ; it is what we humbly request, through thy intercession, O Immaculate Mother of Jesus, greeting thee for this end with the words of the angel, *Ave Maria*.

What a melancholy sight was it, my brethren, to behold the Saviour of the world, amidst all the mirth and public demonstrations of joy at His triumphant entry into Jerusalem, giving full sway to the tenderness of His heart, and bursting out into a flood of tears. A great multitude of people accompanied Him on this occasion, some carrying green boughs in their hands, others strewing their garments on the way under His feet, others singing the praises of the Lord, and crying out with a loud voice : *Hosanna to the Son of David, Blessed be the King of Israel, who cometh in the name of the Lord, peace in heaven and glory in the highest* ; but in the midst of all these joyful acclamations Jesus began to weep. No sooner did He behold Jerusalem at a distance, but His

heart was overwhelmed with sadness, and His eyes, His beautiful and divine eyes, the sight of which formerly wrought the conversion of so many sinners on earth, and now makes the blessed in heaven happy, were bathed in tears. If we dive into the cause of this astonishing conduct of our Redeemer, and inquire why the joy of angels was thus afflicted, He assigns the reason Himself, and tells us that He wept over Jerusalem, *because it knew not the time of its visitation*. He bewailed its future destruction ; He lamented the blindness and infidelity of the Jews, whose hearts were harder than the very rocks themselves ; He wept over their unfortunate metropolis, which, after murdering so many holy prophets, was to be in a short time the theatre of His bloody passion. He hastened toward it, indeed, in triumph, to show how willing He was to lay down His life for the salvation of mankind, and that He was in no way terrified at the foresight of the bitter torments and most ignominious death prepared there for Him ; but as if He forgot Himself, and was regardless of His own sufferings, He only fixed His eyes and thoughts on Jerusalem ; He considered that that was the last day of mercy and vocation that would be offered to it, and foreseeing the miseries and calamities which its inhabitants were to endure in punishment of their notorious ingratitude and obstinacy, He could not forbear breaking out into sighs and tears. O wonderful charity of our Divine Jesus ! His compassion for that sinful city was an emblem of His pity on sinners, and demonstrates His sincere desire of the conversion of those, who, like Jerusalem, are insensible of their own sad condition, rebellious to God's grace, and deaf to the fatherly admonitions whereby He calls them to repentance ; for, in weeping over Jerusalem, we are not to suppose that it was over the stately palaces and holy buildings, but over the people of Jerusalem that Jesus wept. It was over you He wept, O sinners, who let loose the reins of your unruly passions, who put off your conversion from day to day, and, like Jerusalem, neglect the favorable time and the precious moments of your visitation. He wept over you, O worldlings, who are so strangely infatuated with the deceitful charms and fawning pleasures of life as not to see your folly, not to think of your future misery, nor guard against your approaching ruin. But be no longer deceived. Unless you be converted to the Lord, the day shall come when your enemies will encompass you on every side, as was the case of Jerusalem ; the day shall come when God's severe justice will overtake you, and cut you off the face of the earth, perhaps in the midst of your career ; the day shall come when legions

of infernal spirits will inclose you at the hour of death, in order to hurry you away to endless flames. These were the reflections which made so deep an impression on the tender heart of Jesus, and drew tears from His eyes ; and *did you but know, even at this day*, as the Gospel says, that peace and reconciliation which God offers you, you would also weep and mingle your tears with the tears of Jesus. In effect, to see the Son of God weeping for us sinners ought to melt our hearts into compunction, and to draw streams of tears from our eyes ; for we must be harder than rocks, and insensible to the highest degree, if we can behold Him pouring forth torrents for our sake, and at the same time remain so callous and unconcerned as not to drop a single penitential tear to lament and wash away our sins, which afflicted Him in so sensible a manner, though it was not His interest, but ours, that affected Him ; for whether we be saved or damned, His happiness will neither admit of increase or decrease ; but, alas ! if we die impenitent in our sins, we shall be utterly lost and undone for ever, and justly condemned to be the fuel of unquenchable flames. St. John Chrysostom says that Jesus wept for nothing but for sin. If He could weep now in Paradise, were He still susceptible of grief, and if sorrow was compatible with the glory He possesses in Heaven, He would shed tears in abundance for the multitude of crying mortal sins that are daily and hourly committed on earth. O mortal sin, thou detestable evil, thou infernal monster and foul progeny of hell ! how enormous must thou be, since nothing else was able to force sighs from the heart, sobs from the mouth, and tears from the eyes of our sweet Redeemer ! I was already convinced of thy enormity by the eternal pains due to thee in hell's devouring flames ; but when I consider the deep impression thou hast made, and the effect thou hast produced in the person of my Saviour, I am more fully convinced of thy baseness, and made more sensible of thy grievousness.

The Gospel informs us that when Jesus went with Mary and Martha to the monument, in order to raise their brother Lazarus to life, He stood over the grave, He sighed, He moaned, He was greatly troubled and touched with sorrow ; *he cried out with a loud voice, and wept*—John, xi. 35. But what do you imagine troubled and afflicted Him in so surprising a manner ? O Christians, it was for you and me that Jesus then wept and moaned ; it was for your crying sins, your curses and blasphemies, your debaucheries and criminal excesses, that He was sensibly afflicted. In the person of Lazarus, who was four days dead,

buried and corrupted, and who had his hands and feet bound with winding bands, and his face tied with a napkin, He lamented the melancholy state of all inveterate and habitual sinners, whereof Lazarus was a striking figure, and whose unhappy souls lie dead, buried, and infected in the grave of mortal sin, not four days only, but several months and years together, without any serious notion of awaking from their lethargic sleep, or of breaking the fetters and chains that hold them in bondage, and keep them under the tyrannical empire of the devil. It was His compassion for such impenitent sinners, and the foreknowledge He had of their future misery in hell, that drew these tears from the eyes of our loving Jesus, and almost broke His heart. He foresaw that all His labors and fatigues would prove useless to them, on account of their own obstinacy and hardness of heart. He considered that His precious blood was to be spilt in vain for thousands of sinners, who, through their own perverseness would perish eternally, notwithstanding His bitter death and passion. These reflections made our tender-hearted Redeemer weep when He stood over the monument of Lazarus; they made Him also weep when He entered Jerusalem; and again, when the first scene of His passion commenced in the Garden of Olives. Then, as the Gospel relates, *his soul was sorrowful even unto death*; then, not content to weep for our sins with the eyes nature had furnished Him with, He wept and poured forth tears and streams of blood through every pore of His sacred body. Can we think of this, my brethren, without blushing at our own insensibility? Can we reflect that our sins, our crying sins, overwhelmed our Divine Redeemer with such a heavy load of sorrow and affliction, and refuse to join our tears with His.

But, O strange hardness of our stony hearts! We lament what we ought not to lament, and we remain unconcerned for what ought to give us the greatest concern; we repine and grieve immoderately at the loss of a law-suit, or of the perishable goods of fortune, and we regret not the loss of God's love and friendship, which is the greatest of all losses. The corporal death of a near relation, of a favorite child, or of a bosom friend, is apt to render many persons inconsolable, says St. Cyprian, whilst the spiritual death of their own souls, lying in the grave of mortal sin, makes little or no impression upon their hearts, though the death of the soul is the greatest evil that can befall a Christian in this life. This was the case of St. Augustine before his conversion; he could not forbear weeping, when he heard the mournful description that Virgil,

the poet, gives of the death of the famous Queen Dido ; and yet, at the same time, the death of his own soul gave him not the least uneasiness. Hear himself, in the first Book of his Confessions, c. 13, bewailing his folly in the following words : I filled my head, says he, with the wanderings of Æneas, whilst I forgot my own errors, whereby I wandered away from Thee, O Lord, like a strayed sheep in the wilderness. I shed many tears for the death of Dido, who killed herself for love, when in the meanwhile, wretched creature as I was, I passed by, with dry eyes, my own self-dying from Thee, O my God, my life, and the light of my heart. But, alas ! what is more miserable than for one who is in misery to have no commiseration for himself, or to weep for the death of others, and not to lament his own spiritual death, or weep for his sins, which rob his soul of the life of grace ?

It was for this reason that our Saviour, carrying His cross on His bleeding shoulders toward Mount Calvary, and seeing some pious women in the crowd weeping and bewailing His condition, He turned toward them and said (Luke xxiii. 28) : *Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not over me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children ; as if He had said, If you have tears to spare, reserve them for another use, shed them for your sins ; for if in the greenwood they do these things, what shall be done in the dry ?* If the just are treated with such severity, what will become of the wicked, who like unto dry wood bring forth no fruit, and are only fit to be cast into the fire to burn ? *Behold, the day will come in which it shall be said, Happy they that are barren, and the breasts that have not given suck.* The day will come when the Lord shall reduce the earth into a wilderness, and crush the sinners thereof into pieces ; then, ready to sink into the ground with shame, and wishing to hide themselves from the face of their angry Judge, they will begin to lament their unhappy fate ; but their lamentations and tears will turn to no account ; their prayers and entreaties will be of no service ; for the reign of mercy will be expired, and justice alone will sit on the bench. Impenitent sinners, who now refuse to lament their sins with penitential tears, will be confounded then at the thoughts of their insensibility and fatal blindness ; they will be convinced, by woeful experience, of the dangerous and dreadful consequences of procrastinating their conversion, of abusing God's mercy, of rejecting His gracious calls, and neglecting the favorable time, and the precious moments of their visitation.

Jerusalem, unfortunate Jerusalem, thou art a terrible instance hereof !

That unhappy city, which was a figure of a sinful soul, had many signal favors conferred upon it. After several holy prophets had been sent to it in vain, Jesus Christ Himself in person vouchsafed to honor it with His presence, His preaching, and His miracles. He was pleased to visit it in the days of mercy, and to invite it to repentance with these most affectionate words : *Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often have I been willing to gather thy children together, as the hen gathers her chickens under her wings?* But Jerusalem repaid all these favors with ingratitude ; it murdered the prophets of the Lord, and stoned those to death who were sent to it by the Father of Mercies ; it refused obstinately to correspond with God's graces, slighted His merciful invitations to repentance, and neglected the precious time of its visitation ; wherefore, God's justice taking place of His mercy, in punishment of its obstinacy, it was delivered over to the fury of its enemies, forty days after the passion of our Saviour. So long a time was given unto Jerusalem to repent ; that city was besieged, taken, ransacked, burnt, overthrown and leveled with the ground, by the Roman Emperors Titus and Vaspasian ; the magnificent temple of Solomon was reduced to a heap of rubbish, and of all the lofty towers and palaces not one stone was left upon another.

Thou didst foresee this, O sweetest Jesus, long before it happened, and therefore Thou didst weep over Jerusalem, or rather over all impenitent and obstinate sinners, who were prefigured by it, and who, like Jerusalem, are deaf to God's calls, harden their hearts and resist the inspirations of the Holy Ghost ; but the day, alas ! will come when they shall learn, to their inexpressible sorrow, that the sad disaster of Jerusalem was but a feeble representation of the punishment prepared for them in the scorching flames of hell. *These things are now hidden from them*, as the Gospel says ; but then their eyes will be opened, and they shall acknowledge when it will be too late, that the visible judgments and scourges that fell on Jerusalem, were scarce a shadow of the dreadful torments reserved in the next life for those who neglect the favorable opportunities that God's infinite goodness affords them to do penance for their sins in this life. I heartily wish, my brethren, that the Lord may preserve you all from ever having an experimental knowledge hereof, and therefore I conjure you to mingle your penitential tears this day with the tears of your compassionate and tender-hearted Redeemer. It is better for you to weep in time than to weep in vain for all eternity in hell. Remember that one single mortal sin is enough

to make a sinner weep for an eternity. Remember that one single tear now will avail you more than a whole torrent of tears will avail you hereafter. *Let the world then rejoice ; its joy will terminate in sorrow. Do you grieve and weep for your sins, and your grief will be changed into joy*—John, xvi. Tears, like the tears of David, says St. John Chrysostom, are able to quench the flames of hell ; they are a most powerful means to move the Father of Mercies to wash away, with His divine grace, the blackest stains of your sins, and to render your souls as white as the driven snow. He calls upon you, this day, to return to Him without further delay ; His arms are open to embrace you ; His head is bowed down to give you the kiss of peace ; His side is open to give you admittance to His loving heart. Let me then entreat you to harden your hearts no longer, but *to seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near*—Isai. lv. Perhaps this very time is the precious *moment of your visitation* ; perhaps it is the happy moment that Heaven has destined from all eternity for your conversion, O unfortunate sinners, who for several years past have been entangling yourselves in a labyrinth of criminal disorders ; perhaps this is the last call that will be given you, and the last time that an offer of mercy, grace, and salvation will be ever made to you. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem ! O sinful soul, be therefore sincerely and speedily converted to the Lord your God. *Be converted*, he says, through the mouth of the Prophet Ezekiel (xxxi. 21) : *Be converted from your evil ways ; and why will you die, O house of Israel !* Your conversion will edify the Church militant on earth, and cause joy among the angels in the Church triumphant in Heaven ; for, as the Gospel assures us, *there is more joy in heaven before the angels of God over one sinner that doth penance, than over ninety-nine just who need not penance*—Luke, xv. 7. Jesus Christ, your Divine Redeemer, declares (Matt. ix.) that *He did not come to call the just, but sinners, to repentance* ; and compares Himself to a shepherd, who, having lost one of his sheep, went in search of it, and having found it, after a diligent pursuit, brought it home to his flock upon his own shoulders, with more joy than he felt at the safety of ninety-nine other sheep which he had left in the desert. After all this, who can ever despair of God's mercy ! Far from giving up to despondence, my brethren, *though your crimes should happen to be as red as scarlet, or as numerous as the sands of the sea*, throw yourselves with an entire trust and confidence into the arms of His tender mercy ; approach Him in the person of His representatives here on earth, and

water His feet with tears of compunction, flowing from a contrite and humbled heart. He is the very fountain of all goodness and sweetness, infinitely rich in every perfection, but *particularly rich in mercy*—Eph. ii. 4. If you be weak, His grace is strong ; if your prayers be unworthy, when they are joined with His mediation, and put up in His name, you may be sure of finding acceptance with His Eternal Father. If your sins be many and grievous, His sacred blood is of infinite value, and sufficient to cancel the sins of ten thousand worlds. If you be undeserving of any favor yourselves, there is no favor which God can grant but what He has merited for you ; there is no blessing but what you may obtain through His merits by a strong confidence in Him, and an humble diffidence in yourselves.

O merciful Jesus, who never forsakest those who put their whole trust in Thee, we repose our trust in Thee, and hope that Thou wilt not suffer us to be eternally miserable, since Thou art infinitely good. Preserve us, we beseech Thee, from rejecting Thy graces, or frustrating the designs of Thy mercy through our own obstinacy and perverseness. Grant us the grace of a sincere contrition for our past transgressions, and of a faithful perseverance in Thy service during the remainder of our life, that nothing, either in life or death, may ever separate us from Thee, or prevent our admission into the sacred mansions of heavenly Jerusalem, which Thou hast purchased for us with the price of Thy blood ; and the enjoyment of which I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON THE DANGEROUS SIN OF PRIDE AND VAIN-GLORY.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. The example of the Pharisee and Publican.
- II. The detestable nature of pride.
- III. The acceptable qualities of humility.
- IV. Let us confide in God to root out pride and vainglory.

Omnis qui se exaltat, humiliabitur; et qui se humiliat exaltabitur.—*St. Luc. c. xviii. v. 14.*

Everyone that exalleth himself shall be humbled; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.—*St. Luke, c. xviii. v. 14.*

THERE is no virtue more admired, esteemed, and recommended than humility, and no vice more condemned and decried in the Sacred Scriptures than the opposite vice of pride; yet no virtue is less practiced than true Christian humility, and no vice more common than that of pride. The parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, recorded in this day's Gospel, plainly shows the pernicious effects of pride in the one, and the salutary effects of humility in the other. These two men, as our Blessed Saviour tells us, went up to the Temple of Jerusalem to pray; but O strange contrast! The Pharisee, instead of prostrating himself in the presence of the Almighty God as a criminal, with a feeling sense of his own unworthiness and misery, stood upright in the Temple, with an air of confidence and arrogance, and began to sound his own praise and plead his own merits. Instead of making an humble confession of his faults which the pride of his heart concealed from him, he recited a long catalogue of the good works he had done, and was so taken up with the thoughts of his own righteousness, that he regarded the rest of men with contempt and disdain, particularly the poor publican, whom he despised in his own heart as an unworthy sinner. *My God, I give Thee thanks*, said he, *that I am not like the rest of men: extortioners, unjust dealers, adulterers, nor such as this publican.* On the contrary, the publican sued for pardon by a sincere acknowledgment of his guilt. Though he ventured to come into the Temple of God, he kept at a distance from the sanctuary, and prostrated himself in the most

submissive posture, without even presuming to lift up his eyes to Heaven, but knocked his breast with sorrow, and supplicated for mercy and pardon of his sins in the following words : *O God, be merciful to me, a sinner.* What was the consequence ? His humble petition pierced through the clouds of heaven in an instant, and he was received into favor, and *returned home justified*, whilst the presuming saint, who was puffed up with a favorable opinion of his own merits, and boasted of his imaginary virtues, was despised, rejected, and condemned by the Son of God, who repeatedly declares in the Gospel that *every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.* To excite you to a just abhorrence and detestation of the dangerous sin of pride and vainglory, and to the love and practice of the opposite virtue of humility, is the design of the following discourse, wherein I shall endeavor to show you, that as no vice is more odious to God, or more pernicious to man than pride, so no virtue is more acceptable to God, or more salutary to man, than humility. Let us first implore the divine assistance, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, who, on account of her profound humility, was exalted to the supereminent degree of the Mother of God. *Ave Maria.*

Pride, according to the description that St. Augustine gives of it (L. 14, de Civ. c. 13), is an inordinate self-love or complacency in one's own self, that makes a person refer everything to himself, and have nothing in view but self-exaltation and self-esteem, instead of attaching himself to God, and referring all things to His honor and glory. This sin is justly ranked at the head of the seven capital sins, because it is a universal sin, the poisonous source and root of all sin, and makes an essential ingredient of the malice of every other sin. The Scripture calls it *the beginning of all sin*, and says, *that it is hateful before God and men, and that he that holdeth it shall be filled with maledictions, and it shall ruin him in the end*—Eccles. x. 7, 15. For this reason, the venerable old Tobias gave his son the following advice : *Never suffer pride to reign in thy mind, or in thy words, for from it all perdition took its beginning.* When it is not resisted, but wilfully cherished in the heart, and suffered to reign in the soul without control, it is looked upon by spiritual writers to be one of the most evident marks of reprobation, as it is one of the greatest obstacles to God's grace, and, of course, the most dangerous enemy of our souls. What renders it of all other crimes the most odious, the most detestable and offensive in

the sight of God is, the extreme opposition it bears to the glory of God; for the proud withdraw themselves in their own idea from the subjection they owe to God, and upon the essential dependence which they have upon Him; they stand upon their own bottom, as if they had no need of Him, and could do without Him; they effect a self-excellence, which belongs to God alone, and which is as essential to God, as his self-existence and independence. *They fall off from God*, says Eccles. x, 14, *and their hearts depart from him that made them*. By this rebellion they separate themselves from the principle of all that is good, and instead of giving all honor and glory to Him alone, to whom all praise and glory are due, they pretend to rival God and attribute the pure effects of His bounty and liberality to their own merit, if not in express terms, at least in the pride of their own hearts, and in the whole tenor of their conduct. Thus they set themselves up, as it were, in the throne of God, and, Satan-like, invade God's right, dispute His prerogative, and by looking on His gifts as their own property, they attempt to rob Him of that glory which essentially belongs to Him, and of which He is so jealous that He declares, through the mouth of the Prophet Isaias (xlii. 8), *I, the Lord, this is my name: I will not give my glory to another*.

This made St. Augustine cry out, in the sixteenth chapter of his Soliloquies: "He, O Lord, who seeks not Thy glory, but his own, in the good he does, and desires to be praised for Thy gifts, is a robber, and resembles the devil himself, who pretended to rob Thee of Thy glory." But God, who severely punished pride in His angels, will not tolerate it in man, who is but a lump of clay and a handful of dust and ashes. Nay, He seems to take pleasure in defeating the projects of the proud and high-minded, who thus appropriate to themselves His incommunicable prerogative, by withdrawing His hand from them, and permitting them sometimes, through an effect of His justice, to fall openly into shameful disorders, in order to pull down their pride and arrogance. How odious pride is in His sight, appears evidently from the fall of Lucifer and his apostate confederates, who, instead of meriting an increase of happiness, by paying unto the Lord the homage of their adoration, and referring the gifts of nature and grace with which they were adorned to the great source and principle of perfection, forfeited the glory of Heaven through their own fault, and were doomed to the gloomy regions of hell, because they proudly valued themselves on their dazzling beauty and excellent gifts, as if they had not received them

from God, but had them from themselves—Isaias xiv. 13. The dreadful judgments denounced against Pharaoh, king of Egypt (Exod. v. 1), against Nabuchodonosor, king of Babylon (Dan. iv. 27), and against Sennacherib, king of Assyria (Isaias xxxvii. 10, 36), to punish whose pride an angel, sent from Heaven, slew one hundred and eighty-five thousand of his army in one night, are manifest proofs of the hatred that the Almighty bears to the proud, who attribute to themselves the good qualifications they possess, and who value themselves and seek to be esteemed, praised and honored on that account, instead of referring all to God, and giving glory to Him who is the author of all good, and *to whom alone all praise, glory, and honor are due for ever and ever*—1 Tim. i. 17. *Every proud man*, who thus forgetful of God exults in the fumes of his own supposed excellency and perfection, and glories in himself, as if his riches, power, strength, valor, knowledge, and beauty were his own property, to be solely attributed to his merit, industry, courage, and conduct, *is an abomination to the Lord*, as the wise man says—chap. xvi. v. 4.

St. Gregory, in his twenty-third book of *Morals*, distinguishes four different branches of pride, which are diametrically opposite to the four distinguishing characters of humility. The four branches of pride are, ambition, presumption, vainglory, and hypocrisy. They are called the daughters of pride, and are the different ways that this odious and pernicious vice shows itself. That branch of pride which is called *vainglory*, because it has for its object an imaginary excellence in the way of glory, that is, in the way of being known, admired, praised, and esteemed by others, is the fruitful parent of a numerous offspring of other pernicious evils. This was the darling vice of the Scribes and Pharisees; this was the idol of their hearts, to which they sacrificed their fasts, their prayers, and their alms-deeds. They performed all their outward works of piety and devotion, that they might be seen, honored, and esteemed by men; for which reason our Blessed Saviour pronounced so many dreadful woes against them in the Gospel, and declared that they were entitled to no other recompense but what they had received here—the empty breath of sinners, the vain, precarious praises and applauses of the unthinking multitude—Matt. vi. 5. Such is the malignity of the sin of pride and vainglory, and so pernicious are its effects, that it robs a man in the sight of God of the merit and reward of all his good works; it corrupts the very vitals of the soul, and leaves nothing sound in it; it poisons the root of every virtue, and, like unto a worm, corrodes and eats up the

substance of the very best actions. St. Basil compares it to an insidious thief, that lies in wait for good works, in order to destroy their value and merit. Other writers compare it to a snake, that creeps insensibly into the soul, lurks unnoticed in the inmost recesses of the heart, and, as St. Gregory remarks, often hides itself under sack-cloth and ashes. Nothing is to be dreaded more by pious Christians, in the performance of their spiritual duties and devotional exercises. The greater progress they have made in the way of perfection, the more they are exposed to this vice, and the greater danger they are in of forfeiting their crown, and losing the fruit of all their labors, unless they be constantly upon their guard to resist the suggestions of pride and vainglory. Other vices are the vices of sinners, have something evil for their object, and are not to be gratified but by the perpetration of wicked actions ; but this vice chiefly arises from objects that are good, and as it first began among the angels, it usually attacks heavenly souls, and is one of the most subtle and most delicate temptations that the enemy of mankind makes use of to insinuate a deadly poison into the secret foldings of their hearts. He takes no extraordinary pains to tempt notorious profligates and scandalous libertines, as he thinks he is sure of them, and expects that they will of course fall one day into his hands, and become an easy prey to his malice ; but when he sees Christians devoted to the service of God, intent on the practice of good works, and standing fair for a never-fading crown of glory in the kingdom of Heaven, he sets all his engines at work, and artfully spreads the net of pride and vainglory, in order to ensnare their souls, and strip them at once of all the spiritual riches of grace and virtue which they have been accumulating for several years. He knows it would be to no purpose to tempt them to fall into glaring and palpable crimes, and therefore he endeavors to infect and vitiate their virtues and good works with the bane of vainglory. He endeavors to fill them with a presumptuous opinion of their own merits, and to persuade them that they are not like the rest of mankind ; that they have not been guilty of any gross crimes, like many others in the world ; that they have served the Lord faithfully for several years, and consequently that they have a right to expect great rewards from Him in heaven. There is not a more evident proof of pride than to imagine ourselves to be out of the reach of it ; they are often most guilty of it who do not believe themselves to be proud. Other crimes are apt to stare men in the face, and disgust them by their deformity at the first sight ; but this subtle and pestiferous vice steals upon them

almost imperceptibly, and deceives them in such a manner, that, as St. Thomas of Villanova remarks, they are often full of it up to their very eyes, without being sensible of it themselves. It is the first vice that generally attacks those who apply themselves to a virtuous life, and the last that leaves them ; it is born with us, and closely twisted and interwoven with our corrupt nature, and mankind is so strongly inclined to it, that most persons are more or less guilty of it. We have received it by inheritance from our first parents, and it is the most deeply rooted and the most dangerous of all the spiritual maladies and wounds that original sin has inflicted on human nature. Where is the man that does not feel in himself a violent bent and fondness for admiration and praise ? Where is the man who is entirely exempt from self-complacency and self-love ? Where is the man who is not pleasing in his own eyes, and who is not desirous of being pleasing to others ? A little applause, though ever so undeserved, is apt to exalt some people in their own conceit, and to swell them with vanity ; pride being a passion of that strange nature that will feed upon almost every little trifle, and upon mere empty shadows, appearances, and imaginary excellencies, when it has nothing real or solid to subsist on. It insinuates itself under a thousand shapes and forms ; it even covers itself sometimes with the cloak of humility, and makes men proud of humility itself. How many will you not find in the very midst of Christianity, who, under the mask of an apparent humility, are idolators of themselves, and dupes of a subtle refined pride ! They are humble in their words, but in their hearts they are puffed up and elated with such an idea of their own imaginary perfections that they cannot endure the least contradiction, or bear to be slighted or treated with the smallest disrespect or inattention. *Tange montes et fumigabunt.* They are all mildness and pictures of forbearance, as long as they are thwarted ; but if you offend their delicacy, the mask will disappear, and their anger will begin to vent itself without restraint. Others will boast of their talents and abilities, and pretend to be versed in every science ; but, with all their boasted knowledge, they are strangers to the very first elements of true wisdom, since they are ignorant of themselves, and vainly *think they are something, whereas they are nothing*, as the Apostle speaks—Galat. vi. 3. They are active, restless, and bustling ; they aspire presumptuously to exploits beyond their sphere, and are fond of such works and employments as attract public applause and esteem, the two darlings of human pride, to which they sacrifice their care and occupations, and which they

unhappily make the last end of all their pursuits. Others are obstinate, positive, contentious, and extremely attached to their own will and judgment ; they are full of envy, jealousy, bitterness, and indignation against those who are preferred before themselves, or shown greater marks of honor and esteem, considering their good qualities as a diminution of their own supposed excellence ; they censure and judge them rashly, misconstrue their virtuous actions, and give them a malicious turn. Like the censorious Pharisee, they discern a mote in a brother's eye, as the Gospel says, at the same time that they do not perceive a beam in their own ; they are filled with scorn, disdain, and contempt for their neighbor, and clear-sighted in discovering his failings and imperfections, but blind to their own real faults, and to the many evil dispositions that spring from the pride and corruption of their hearts.

It is only the all-powerful hand of God that can cure us of these dreadful evils, and entirely root the pernicious vice of pride, with its various branches out of the soul ; we should, therefore, frequently implore the assistance of His divine grace by fervent prayer, and labor incessantly on our part to check the pride of our hearts, and to stifle the flattering delusions of self-love by a profound humility ; we should watch carefully over our interior, and beware of attributing to our own merits the gifts that we have received gratis from the pure bounty of our Maker. *What hast thou* (says St. Paul), *that thou hast not received ; and if thou hast received, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received ?* (1 Cor. iv. 7). And again (2 Cor. 10): *He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord*, who, in crowning our good works, crowns His own gifts and the effects of His grace, according to St. Augustine. Instead of entertaining any vain self-complacency in our hearts, or in our minds, we should gratefully acknowledge our own indigence and dependence on Him in all things, and remember, that *the more we have received, the more shall be required of us*. We should enter into the humble sentiments of the Apostle, who says : *What I am, I am by the grace of God* ; and cry out with the Royal Prophet (Ps. cxiii. 9): *Not to us, O Lord, not to us : but to thy name, may all praise, honor, and glory be given*. In Him only we are to confide, and not in ourselves, or in our own righteousness, as the proud Pharisee did. In all our works we are to seek only to please Him and do His holy will, in imitation of Christ our Lord, who never sought His own glory, or the praise of men, but did all His works with the most pure intention, for the honor and glory of His Heavenly Father—John, viii. 49, 54. Humility

was His favorite virtue, and ought to be the favorite virtue of every Christian. He came from Heaven to teach us humility by His example, as well as by His doctrine ; in every stage of His life we meet with lessons of humility. *Learn of me*, He says (Matt. xi. 29), *to be meek and humble of heart, and you shall find rest to your souls*. To inculcate the excellency, and to enforce the necessity of this amiable virtue in the most striking manner, when His Disciples were disputing among themselves for pre-eminence, and asked Him who was the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven, He called to Him a little child, and having placed him in the midst of them, He said : *Amen, I say to you ; unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven ; whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of Heaven*—Matt. xviii. 3, 4. O Almighty God, who resisteth the proud, and givest Thy grace to the humble, inspire us with a just abhorrence of the destructive vice of pride, and excite us to the love and practice of the opposite virtue of humility, that we may be favored with Thy grace here, and inherit Thy glory hereafter. Which is the happiness, my brethren, that I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen*.

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON THE SIN OF DETRACTION.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. Christ used ceremonies in healing the deaf and dumb man.
- II. Detraction is offensive to God and injurious to man.
- III. Detraction is detrimental to the detractor and fraught with injurious and irreparable consequences.
- IV. A prayer for the true charity of Jesus Christ.

Jesus tetigit linguam ejus, et suspiciens in cœlum ingemuit.

St. Marc. c. vii. v. 33.

Jesus touched his tongue, and looking up to heaven, he sighed.—St. Mark, c. vii. v. 33.

THE subject of this day's Gospel is an illustrious miracle, wrought by our Blessed Redeemer in favor of a man who was both deaf and dumb. The Son of God, pitying his condition, and taking him aside from the crowd, put His fingers into the ears of this poor man, and touched his

tongue with a little spittle ; then looking up to Heaven, from whence all blessings descend, He sighed, and commanded the mouth and the ears of the deaf and dumb man to be opened ; and immediately, his ears being opened, and the string of his tongue being loosed, he recovered the perfect use of his hearing, and of his speech, to the great astonishment of the multitude then present, whom our Saviour, willing to give us an example of humility, charged not to publish the miracle they were eye-witnesses of ; but the more He recommended silence to them, the more their zeal prompted them to publish it, and to proclaim the praises of Jesus Christ, crying out with a loud voice : *He hath done all things well ; he hath made the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.* Here we see the use of sacred ceremonies approved and authorized by the example of Christ Himself. In curing this man, as well as the man who had been born blind (John, xi. 6), what a number of ceremonies did He make use of, and for what end ! A single word from Him was fully sufficient for the purpose of curing both the one and the other ; but as His actions are recorded for our example, we have His sacred authority in approbation of the holy ceremonies used by the Church upon different occasions. The very ceremony He used in curing the deaf and dumb man, mentioned in this day's Gospel, is taken from His example, and is still retained and observed in the administration of baptism, to signify that by the grace of baptism the ears of our soul are open to the Word of God, and the inspirations of His Holy Spirit, and that by obeying His divine will, manifested to us by this means, we are to become *a good odor of Christ* (2 Cor. ii. 15), by our good example and edifying conversation.

Yet, alas ! how many Christians are there to be found, who, in open violation of the covenant and sacred obligations of their baptism, dishonor and disgrace the Christian name by their disorderly conduct and scandalous conversation ! They may, indeed, be said to resemble in some respect the deaf and dumb man spoken of in the Gospel, as they are, in a moral sense, not only dumb but likewise deaf ; for they are silent when the honor and glory of God, and the edification of their neighbor, call on them to speak out and make a proper use of the gift of speech. They are deaf to the inspirations of God, and to the clamors of a guilty conscience, inviting them to open their mouths in fervent prayer, and implore mercy and pardon of their sins by a sincere repentance. They neglect to employ their tongues for such salutary purposes, whilst they unhappily make them subservient to the most

odious vices, and instrumental to the most horrid crime of cursing, swearing, blaspheming, and abusing the adorable name of the Lord their God. How frequently are their tongues employed in spreading the *infection and odor of death*, and in calumniating and in detracting their neighbors? It is on the pernicious and destructive sin of detraction that I intend to expatiate in the following discourse, in order to excite you to a just abhorrence and detestation of so foul a vice, by showing you how offensive it is to God, how injurious to our neighbor, and how detrimental to the detractor himself. In short, detraction is highly offensive to God, and injurious to man. This shall be the subject of the first point. Detraction is highly detrimental to the detractor himself, and attended with consequences extremely dangerous and almost irreparable. This shall be the subject of the second point. Let us previously implore the divine aid and unction of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin. *Ave Maria.*

Detraction is an unjust defamation of our neighbor, or a blackening of another person's character in his absence. It is called *detraction*, not because it detracts from the truth, but as St. Thomas of Aquin observes, because it detracts, derogates, and takes from our neighbor's reputation, by lessening the esteem and good opinion others have of him; a man's reputation being as effectually lessened and lost by publishing the crimes he has actually committed as those he has not. To discover the hidden faults of others, when it is necessary for their amendment and conversion, or for the instruction and precaution of those who are in danger of being considerably damaged or corrupted by their wicked principles, had example, company and conversation, is not detraction, but fraternal correction, provided it be done, not out of anger, malice, hatred, or envy, but with a good intention and through a motive of charity and justice, to prevent their ruin and destruction. Thus the Patriarch Joseph, for the amendment of his brothers, discovered their wickedness to his father Jacob—Gen. xxxvii. Mardocheus manifested the conspiracy of Bagan and Thares—Esth. ii. St. Paul also notified the impiety of Alexander, the coppersmith, lest the innocent might be defrauded and deceived by him (Eph. ii. 4); and Christ Himself published the malice and hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees, to precaution His Disciples from following their example. All kinds of false testimonies, calumnies, and detractions, are forbidden by the eighth commandment. False testimonies were punished in the Mosaic Law, by inflicting the same penalty on the false witness which he would have brought on his neighbor had he

been really guilty, and had the fact been fully proved against him—Deut. xix. 19. The very pagans themselves held the crime of bearing false witness in such abhorrence that they punished it with death, as appears from the practice of the ancient Romans, who condemned false witnesses to be cast headlong down from the Tarpeian Rock. Detraction differs from contumely, as theft differs from robbery; for contumely attacks a person's good name openly and before his face, but the base and cowardly vice of detraction stabs his reputation secretly and behind his back, without allowing him the opportunity of self-defense. Detraction differs also from calumny or slander; for calumny is a false accusation, whereby a person is charged with a crime he is really innocent of, as was the case of the virtuous Joseph, mentioned in the Book of Genesis, and of the chaste Susanna, spoken of in the Book of Daniel; but detraction is committed by divulging, without necessity, the private and hidden crimes a person has been really guilty of, or by exposing some considerable defect that tends to his prejudice. This vice betrays a great corruption of heart, and commonly arises from a certain degree of pride and envy, which makes men blind to their own faults, and clear-sighted to discover faults in others; for a man of a depraved heart is apt to look at others through the medium of his own passions, and to judge them to be evil because he is evil himself. Like unto those vile insects and noxious flies which delight to dwell always on filth and corruption, the detractor makes the crimes and infirmities of his neighbors his favorite topic, and the ordinary subject of his conversation; he pretends, like the Pharisee in the Gospel, to see a mote in his brother's eye, at the same time he does not perceive the beam in his own eye.

Charity judges favorably of all men, has compassion for their failings, and excuses their intentions when it cannot excuse their actions. It seeks rather the salvation than the defamation of a neighbor, and studies to conceal and diminish, rather than to propagate and augment scandal; it usually declares on the favorable side of mercy, and evinces a dignity and greatness of soul in taking the unfortunate under protection. Detraction, on the contrary, evinces a total want of every liberal, noble, and generous sentiment; it sports with a neighbor's misfortune, and exults at his downfall; it blackens him with odious aspersions, and propagates scandalous hearsays and reports, in order to expose him to contempt, disgrace, and ridicule. The bee extracts honey out of the most bitter flowers: but the detractor takes a bad meaning out of things that are highly commendable and really praiseworthy in themselves.

He puts a malicious construction on the very best actions, depreciates the most amiable qualities, and turns the virtues of his neighbor into vices. He feels a secret pleasure in speaking freely of the faults and imperfections of others wherever he goes, particularly when he has, or thinks he has truth on his side, and by this means he becomes the unhappy cause of numberless quarrels, divisions, and animosities. In short, he sets neighbors at variance with each other, he sows discord in families, and disunites the most intimate friends, and arms brother against brother, and husband against wife. May I not, then, justly apply what St. James says, in chap. iii. of his Catholic epistle, v. 6 and 8, to the tongue of a detractor? *It is a devouring fire, a world of iniquity, an unquiet evil, full of deadly poison.* It spares nothing, whether sacred or profane, but discharges its fury on the good grain and on the chaff, on the prince and on the subject, on the ecclesiastic and on the layman, leaving ruin and desolation wherever it passes. It penetrates into the earth, to root up what has been buried in oblivion, and it seeks, in the ashes of the dead, the faults which have been already canceled in the sight of God by tears of repentance, and which time has effaced out of the memory of men. There is no mischief that can be thought of, says St. John Chrysostom, but the tongue of a detractor is productive of; for which reason the Holy Scripture cautions us in the strongest terms *to refrain our tongues from detraction* (Wisdom, i. 11), and expressly declares that *detractors are odious in the sight of God*, and that *the whisperer, the tattler, and the double-tongued are accursed, because they trouble many that are in peace*—Eccles. xxi. *Their words are smoother than oil*, says the Royal Prophet (Ps. liv.), *and in the end they are darts*, which, like the sting in the serpent's tail, carry poison with them, and wound the deeper the more they are disguised; and again (Ps. v.), *their mouth is an open sepulchre*, which exhales a contagious infection, and their tongues resemble a sharp-whetted sword, that destroys the reputation and civil life of many, whose conduct in other respects is regular, virtuous, and edifying. St. James concludes, therefore, that *if anyone imagines himself to be religious, not bridling his tongue, this man's religion is vain*—i. 26.

The Prophet Jeremias gives us a pathetic description of the damages done by a detracting tongue under the figure of a fertile olive tree, beautiful to the sight, both for the number of its branches, and the quantity and quality of its fruit: but being set on fire by a few sparks carried to it by a blast of wind, all its branches were in a short time

consumed, its beauty soon perished, and all its fruit was destroyed. This olive tree is a figure or representation of an upright just man, of a prudent virtuous woman, of an exemplary pious ecclesiastic, of an honest conscientious tradesman. How great soever their virtue may be, how regular soever their conduct, however strictly honest their dealings, a blast of wind carries fire to the olive tree, and consumes in a moment all its leaves, branches, and fruit ; that is to say, a few words of a detracting tongue blast their reputation and brand them with infamy. Who would believe it, says St. Bernard, that so small a thing as a word of detraction could cause such a dreadful havoc? Yes, my brethren, gunpowder that has taken fire may be as well confined as detraction, or a restraint may be as well put on the sea when the banks are broken down ; for when detraction has once passed the lips, it flies like a flash of lightning, but still it fails not to make deep and mortal wounds. The detracted person is immediately reduced to a state of civil death. He becomes like unto a dead member in the community, says St. Francis of Sales. He sinks into an object of infamy and public contempt—a sport for some, a pity for others. He is torn within and without ; within a prey to his own remorse, without a butt to the satires and censures of men. The sun only rises to enlighten his shame, to let him see the remains of his shattered character, and to bear the dishonor and disgrace of it ; so that it were better for him to have been blackened by calumny than to have been defamed by detraction, for calumny is often for the falsely accused a subject of triumph, and a wound more easily healed ; the shame frequently rebounds on the calumniator who first gave birth to the malicious report. Time clears up the matter ; the falsehood is detected and refuted ; the truth is made manifest, and injured innocence, like gold that is tried by the fire, appears with more lustre than before. Nay, even though the calumny could not be refuted, it might be despised. The assured testimony of a good conscience can revenge itself of the vain and ill-grounded discourses that are daily spread in the world, and it is always an advantage and a comfort to a calumniated Christian to be able to say within himself, that he is innocent in the sight of God of what is laid to his charge. But in detraction there is no such resource ; there are no means to recall it, no effectual remedy to repair the damage. A reputation once ruined by detraction can scarce ever be recovered ; it is a wound almost incurable. Do you wonder, then, that St. Bernard calls *detraction a very grievous crime*;

grande crimen detractio, that stands in direct opposition, not only to the great precept of fraternal charity, but also to natural justice and equity; for let a man's private conduct be what it may, he has a just title to a fair and reputable character as long as he is not convicted of any public offense; till he makes the public witnesses to his crime he is accountable to God alone, and amenable only to the divine tribunal. Whoever, then, discovers his secret crimes, without a just cause or pressing necessity, he is guilty of an injustice far greater, far more cruel, than if by fraud and violence he robbed him of his money or temporal substance; for what is worldly substance when put in competition with a fair character? Is not a fair character the most valuable of all temporal blessings? *Is not a good name preferable to much riches?* as the Scripture says in ch. xxii. of the Book of Proverbs. It may lead the poorest and the most destitute of men to the acquisition of wealth; but a character once lost is not to be repurchased with all the treasures of the earth. I leave yourselves, then, to judge what an injury, what a flaming act of injustice it is, to deprive a person by detraction of that which is in itself so valuable. Can any theft or robbery be comparable to this? says St. Ambrose. Moreover, if the person detracted has already canceled his secret crimes in the sight of God by abundant tears of contrition, is it not unjust, uncharitable, and cruel to the last degree, to revive and publish them in the eyes of the world? Yes, my brethren, carry this truth with you: He that was yesterday a sinner may be a saint this day; and the moment that publishes his crimes is often the moment of mercy which completes his conversion. Remember what is recorded of the penitent Magdalen. The proud Pharisee reproached her with her crimes, and yet in that very instant her love and her tears effaced them at the feet of her Divine Redeemer. May I not, then, justly conclude that detraction is a manifest breach of charity, an open violation of justice, and an odious vice in its own nature, highly offensive to God, and very injurious to man? It is likewise highly detrimental to the detractor himself, and attended with consequences extremely dangerous, and almost irreparable. This is what I promised to show you in the second point.

To convince you how hurtful and dangerous the sin of detraction is to the detractor himself, it might be sufficient to observe, that it is numbered by St. Paul amongst those capital crimes which render men hateful to God, and exclude them from ever inheriting the kingdom of Heaven, unless they be expiated by a true and sincere repentance—

Rom. i. 30 ; 1 Cor. xv. It is, therefore, of its own nature a grievous mortal sin, that causes the spiritual death of the soul of the detractor, and entails eternal death and damnation on it hereafter. What is more, it is often the unhappy occasion of the spiritual death of the person detracted, on account of the hatred and passion of revenge it excites in his heart against the detractor ; nay, the detractor is also accessory to the spiritual death of the criminal accomplices and partakers of his guilt, who concur and join with him in encouraging and propagating the detraction. This made St. Bernard, on Psalm lvi., call *the detractors, tongues a two-edged, nay, a three-edged sword, with which he commits three murders at one stroke*. First, he murders his own soul when he wounds his neighbor's reputation. Secondly, he murders the character of the person he detracts, as he destroys that civil life by which he lived fair in the esteem of others ; a life more dear to men of honor and probity, than the life of the body. Thirdly, he murders the souls of those who give ear with pleasure to the detraction, and encourage, spread, and keep it alive ; for whoever encourages and gives ear to a detractor, is equally criminal with him. Nay, St. Bernard says he knows not which of the two merits damnation the most, the detractor or the listener, since both have the devil in them—the one in his mouth, the other in his ears. O, how many crimes are there then united in this crime ! and how extremely difficult must it be to make reparation for all the mischief and damages caused by it ! Yet, without this reparation, there is no pardon to be obtained ; for detractors are no less strictly obliged to repair the damages done by their means than thieves and robbers are bound to restore the property of their neighbor which they have unjustly acquired. The only difference is, that detractors labor under far greater difficulties in the discharge of this duty than they do who only strip others of the external goods of fortune, and that for two reasons. First, because the damage done by detraction is so extensive that it can scarce be repaired. Secondly, because the weakness of the detractor is such that he can scarce gain on himself to make a due reparation. Such are the dangerous consequences of detraction. The infamy of the detracted neighbor increases in proportion to the number of persons to whom his or her private failings have been disclosed. The scandal augments continually ; each one, repeating the same story, will be apt to add something of his own invention, and to set it off in a more advantageous light. Though discovered at first to only one person, it spreads farther every day, like unto a little brook,

which the farther it runs the larger it continually grows, until at length it becomes a great river, or like that spark of fire mentioned by St. James, which in the beginning appears very inconsiderable, but in a short time consumes the greatest buildings, and spreads ruin and desolation on every side. How difficult, then, must it be for the detractor to repair the injury he has done, and to heal all the wounds his envenomed tongue has inflicted ! The sins of a whole multitude are his sins, and he may be said to detract with as many mouths and as many tongues, as through his means co-operate to destroy the reputation of his neighbor. How will he be able to expiate such evils ! How will he disabuse all those to whose ears his malicious report has reached, and is to reach after his death ; for it is to be observed, that the scandal does not always die with the detractor, but often survives him, so that when his detracting tongue will be buried in the grave, the reputation he blasted will be still destroyed on earth.

But though the detractor should be able to repair the reputation he has blasted by proclaiming his own rashness, and publishing to the world the malice and injustice of his aspersions, is it easy to gain so far on himself as to resolve on such a publication ? And yet to clear his injured neighbor's character, and make a full reparation of the wrong he has done him, he must swallow down all this confusion, and assume the odious titles of a liar, impostor, and calumniator, in case he has, in reality, belied his neighbor. But where are the true penitents to be found, who are willing to submit to such a humiliation ! How few will be persuaded to do what lies in their power on this occasion ! It requires no small stock of humility to retract what one has said, and though it should be done, few will believe the retraction. This shows how dangerous a sin it is, and how difficult the reparation of the damage thereby occasioned is rendered by human pride. What is still a convincing proof that it is extremely difficult, mortifying, and painful to flesh and blood to retract, after having detracted, and to sacrifice one's own good name in order to re-establish that of another, is this, that nothing in the world is more frequent than detraction, nothing more rare than retraction. Mankind is strongly addicted to this vice, says St. Jerome. It unhappily infests all states, ranks, and conditions, inso-much, that even those who have retired to a great distance from other vices, fall into the sin of detraction as into the last snare of the devil. Who is there amongst us who has not a thousand times heard the character of his neighbor torn and mangled in conversation ; and yet

seldom or never has any detractor returned to undeceive us, and make a due reparation, though the obligation is so strict, that no power on earth can exempt the delinquent from it, and so pressing, that it should be deferred, delays herein being particularly prejudicial.

Since, therefore, detraction is so odious and so dangerous a vice, let me entreat you, my brethren, to guard most carefully against all the different ways it is committed, and the various cloaks with which it is often artfully disguised. *Take heed*, says the Scripture (Eccles. xxviii. 30,) *lest thou slip with thy tongue, and in the sight of thy enemies, who lie in wait for thee, and thy fall be incurable unto death.* We are even cautioned in the Holy Scripture against keeping company with detractors. *My son*, says the Holy Ghost (Prov. xxiv.) *have nothing to do with detractors, for their destruction shall rise suddenly.* And again : *Surround thy ears with thorns, and hearken not to a wicked tongue. Make a door for thy mouth, and locks for thy ears. Hast thou heard a word against thy neighbor, let it die within thee*—Eccles. xix. 10.

O Divine Jesus ! infuse into our hearts the spirit of true charity, that we may never lessen our neighbor's reputation by detraction or slander. Give us grace to govern our tongues, to be watchful over all our words, to avoid rash judgments and malicious reflections, and to walk with circumspection in the way of Thy commandments, that after promoting Thy honor and glory, and edifying our neighbor here on earth, both by word and example, we may have the happiness to see and enjoy Thee hereafter for all eternity in the sacred mansions of bliss. Which I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON THE LOVE OF GOD AND OF OUR NEIGHBOR.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. What is charity?
- II. Charity, or the love of God.
- III. Charity, or the love of our neighbor.
- IV. An appeal for both branches of charity.

Diliges Dominum Deum tuum ex toto corde tuo, et proximum tuum sicut te ipsum.—St. Luc. c. x. v. 27.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and thy neighbor as thyself.—St. Luke, c. x. v. 27.

As the sun was created to give light, and the fire to communicate heat, the water to refresh, the air to breathe, the earth to produce its fruits, and these fruits to nourish man, so man himself was created to love and serve the Lord his God. He has made us for Himself, says St. Augustine, and our hearts will be always restless until they repose in Him as the only amiable object that is able to satiate our boundless desires and render us completely happy. Experience has convinced thousands of this great truth, and taught them that even in this life no real content or true happiness is to be found but in loving and serving God. The virtue by which we love God above all things is called Charity, and is ranked by St. Paul in the first place amongst the theological virtues that regard God as their immediate and primary object. *Faith, Hope, Charity, these three, says the Apostle, but the greatest of them is Charity.* Faith and Hope will cease after this life, but Charity shall subsist for all eternity to be the glory and joy of the blessed inhabitants of heavenly Jerusalem. Charity is usually styled the form, the life, the soul, and the queen of all virtues; for all the other virtues are so closely connected with it that they always accompany it, linked, as it were, hand in hand together. When it reigns sovereignly in the heart of a Christian, it animates the whole train of the other virtues, sets them in motion, and reduces them to practice; it is never idle, but ever active, operative, and laborious; it is always doing good wherever it is, and where it does not good, there it is not, as St. Gregory tells us. It is to the soul of a Christian what wings are to a bird, says St. Augus-

time ; it bears it up against all adversity, and enables it to soar above all sublunary things, and to surmount all difficulties that occur in the practice of virtue ; it makes it run with alacrity in the way of the Commandments, and in the road of perfection ; it sweetens all the rigors and austerities of penance and mortification, and renders the yoke of Christ pleasant, and His burden light and easy ; so that everything He prescribes in the Gospel is performed with pleasure and delight by a true lover of God, let it appear ever so disagreeable to the senses, or repugnant to the inclinations of corrupt nature. Those, indeed, who blindly fix their hearts and affections on the toys and trifling enjoyments of this transitory life are unacquainted with these heavenly charms of charity ; but give me one, says the great Augustine, who in reality loves the Lord his God as he ought, and he will bear testimony of the truth of what I say : *Da amantem, et sentit quod dico*. We have almost as many instances and witnesses hereof as there have been saints in the Church of God, the blessed fruits and happy effects of divine charity having appeared conspicuous in the whole tenor of their conduct. This virtue is so necessary that we cannot expect salvation without it, though we should have the faith of an Abraham, the chastity of a Joseph, the zeal of a Moses, and the piety of a David. Though I should have faith strong enough to remove mountains, says the Apostle, though I should distribute all my worldly substance in alms to feed the poor, though I should even deliver my body to be burnt on the score of religion, yet, if I have not charity, it would avail me nothing, and I would be no better than a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. Charity is the nuptial robe with which our souls must be clothed in order to be entitled to admission to the marriage feast, or to partake of the banquet of eternal glory that is prepared for the elect in the kingdom of Heaven. The very spirit of Christianity consists in charity ; it is by it, says St. Augustine, that the children of God are discerned from the children of Satan ; it is the plenitude of the Law, as St. Paul calls it ; it is the chief end of the Law, and the very foundation on which the whole Law and the Prophets depend. Our entire duty and obligation, and the substance of whatever God commands and forbids, is reducible to charity, and briefly contained herein, for which reason the Apostle says : *He that loveth has fulfilled the Law*.

There are two precepts of charity which, like two branches, sprout from the same root ; one of them regards God, the other regards our neighbor ; and the tendency of both the one and the other is to bring

back our hearts and affections to God, and make us recover that happy union with him which mankind lost by the fall of Adam. It is of the nature of those two branches of charity that I intend to speak in the two parts of the following discourse, it being a matter of the greatest consequence for all Christians to be well instructed in so essential a duty. The manner in which we are bound to love the Lord our God shall be the subject of the first point; the manner in which we are bound to love our neighbor, shall be the subject of the second point. Let us previously implore the light of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin. *Ave Maria.*

The Law of God, properly speaking, commands nothing but charity, for this virtue takes in every other duty, and necessarily includes the observance of all the Commandments, which made St. Augustine say: *Ama, et fac quod vis. Love God, and do what you please.* Charity does not consist in certain transient consolations and affectionate motions, which sometimes warm the heart with pleasing transports, and are attended with spiritual sweetness and tears of sensible devotion. Persons of a lively imagination, and inclined to tenderness, are apt to have such feeling sentiments without having the reality of love; they sometimes fancy that they love God, when, in fact, they love Him not, and only love themselves. Many of the saints never experienced or felt such sensible impressions, and yet they really loved God above all things, and with their whole heart and soul. To persevere in the service of God, though we should happen to find in it no relish, no consolation, is a more certain proof of a generous, disinterested, and solid love. It shows that we love God for His own sake. This holy love covers a multitude of sins in this life, and will be rewarded with everlasting happiness in the next life, when the measure of a Christian's glory will be proportioned to the measure and degree of charity that he is possessed of here on earth. *The measure of loving God is, to love him without measure,* says the devout St. Bernard; for if love should be proportioned to the goodness and excellence of the thing beloved, the love due to God should be immense and infinite, as God Himself is immense, and infinitely exalted above all other beings in goodness and in every other perfection; consequently, He deserves to be loved with the most eminent, the most sublime, and the most intense degree of love, were it possible for us to arrive at such perfection in this place of banishment and vale of tears; but it is only in heaven that the actual perfection of charity will be acquired, when the curtain shall be drawn, and the cloud shall

be removed that hides God from us at present. Divided, as we now are, between so many distracting cares and engagements, it is not expected from us, weak and imperfect mortals, that our minds should be constantly united to God by an actual and unrelenting fervor, like unto the blessed Angels and Saints, who see Him clearly face to face, and perceive such charms in Him that they are forcibly, but sweetly attracted by His incomprehensible beauty, and have it not in their power to restrain their love, or to turn their thoughts from Him even for a single moment.

However, though we cannot pretend to such a degree of fervor, we are indispensably bound, as far as our condition and infirmities here below will admit, *to love the Lord our God with our whole soul, with our whole mind, and with all our strength.* This is what constitutes the essence of divine charity ; this is the first and the greatest of all the Commandments ; and at the same time that it points out our duty to us, it affords us, as St. Augustine and St. John Chrysostom remark, a sad proof of the miserable condition to which sin had reduced the children of Adam, as they stood in need of a formal precept to press and engage them to love the Sovereign Good and the Fountain of all Love. To love Him in the manner enjoined in this precept, is to give Him effectually the first place in our hearts and in our affections ; it is to love Him sovereignly, and in preference to everything in heaven and on earth ; it is to love Him more than ourselves, and better than our own life ; it is to be disposed to part with what is dearest to us in this world, rather than part with His grace, forfeit his friendship, or offend Him by a single mortal sin ; it is to prize, value, and esteem Him inwardly in our minds above all things in the universe, and to make Him the principal object of our thoughts, the centre of our desires, the beginning and last end of all our pursuits ; it is to employ the faculties of our souls in meditating on His eternal truths, our senses in glorifying Him, our tongues in blessing and praising His holy name, our hands, our strength, our labor, and industry in serving Him, and doing good works to promote His honor and glory.

The love of Him neither admits of superior or rival. He claims our whole heart, or will accept of no part of it ; He requires it entirely, without division or reserve. It is not sufficient to give it to Him by halves, as they do who are for serving two masters, God and the world ; God must be the only object of our whole love, and we are not to love any created object with Him, finally for itself, but only for Him, in Him,

and with a due subordination to our love for Him ; for, as St. Augustine says (L. 10, Conf. c. 29): he who loves anything with God, which he does not love for God, is deficient in loving God, because, as God is the principle from whence everything proceeds, so He is likewise the centre in which everything must terminate. We are to love Him for Himself, and we are to love nothing out of Him, but for His sake, and with a view and reference to Him. For this reason the aforesaid holy doctor compares the love of God to a great river, which is endowed with the tributary waters of several small rivulets that flow into it. It is thus that all the different species of well regulated love, whether of our neighbor or of ourselves, must, like so many different rivulets, be all united together in the immense ocean of the adorable perfections of God, by which means we may be truly said to love God in all things, and all things in God, and for God, and less than God.

Nothing is more just, nothing is more conformable to the dictates of right reason, nothing can be better adapted to all capacities than this important duty. The poor, as well as the rich ; the ignorant, as well as the learned ; the weak and sickly, as well as the strong and healthy, are capable hereof, and can neither plead any excuse, nor claim the least exemption. Heaven and earth cry out to us on every side, as St. Augustine speaks, that we are indispensably bound to love Him, who is our first beginning and last end. They proclaim His glory and grandeur with a loud voice, and tell us that He is infinitely worthy of all possible love from us and from all creatures. Wherever we turn our eyes, we behold visible traces and striking proofs of His goodness, not only in the order of nature, but also in the order of grace, and in the order of glory. From Him we have received our very existence, and to His pure bounty we are indebted for all we have and possess. The inestimable benefits of our creation, redemption, sanctification, and preservation, are the wonderful effects of His boundless charity ; they are so many powerful and endearing motives for loving Him with a love of gratitude, on account of His goodness to us in this life, and the eternal happiness He has prepared for us in heaven. But, besides loving Him with a love of gratitude on this account; and because *he is infinitely good to us*, we are also bound to love Him for His own sake, and *because he is infinitely good in himself*.

This is the primary and principle motive on which our love for God is to be grounded, as the love that is grounded on this motive is peculiar to the virtue of charity, which is a pure disinterested love of preference,

complacency, and benevolence, whereby God is loved on account of the infinite excellency of His own divine nature, and for His own intrinsic goodness, because *he is what he is*, the most perfect, the most excellent, the most beautiful of all beings ; in short, because He is God, infinitely good in Himself.

The other two theological virtues are founded upon some of His divine perfections in particular. Faith is founded upon His veracity, Hope is founded upon His mercy and power, but Charity is grounded upon all His attributes, and embraces Him as the Sovereign Good, infinitely lovely in every perfection. Why then, *O ye sons of men*, cries out the Royal Prophet, *why do ye love vanity*, and grasp at mere illusions? Why do you run blindly after empty shadows of felicity? Why do you set your affections on the fleeting joys and perishable goods of a deceitful, treacherous world? *O come, see, and taste how sweet and amiable the Lord your God is, and how good to all those who love him!* He is the only real, solid and substantial good that deserves to be loved, and that can fix the agitation of the heart of man. He is the source of all goodness, the fountain of all loveliness, the centre of all happiness, and an overflowing ocean of all sweetness, of all charms, of all delights ; all that is delightful, charming, good, and amiable in the whole creation, flowing from Him, as a rivulet flows from its spring, or as the rays of light proceed from the sun. How long, then, O sinners, will you continue to harden your hearts and prostitute your affections on petty toys and trifles? How long will you be so infatuated as to abandon the fountain of living waters, and wallow in the muddy streams and putrid mire of filthy carnal pleasures? All your happiness, both in time and eternity, depends on loving the Lord your God above all things. Why then do you turn your backs to Him, and shamefully give a decided preference to a vile creature, to a worm of the earth, to a lump of clay, and to a handful of dust and ashes? Why do you sacrifice your immortal souls to a sensual gratification, to an imaginary point of honor, to a phantom of vainglory and human applause, to the love of dress, to the vanity of being admired, to a sordid temporal interest?

The great precept of charity begins first to bind us to pay an actual tribute of our love to our Creator, as soon, morally speaking, as we attain the use of reason. This is a debt, an homage, an offering we owe Him as our Sovereign Lord and Master, our first beginning and last end. All the sacrifices of the first fruits that were prescribed in the Old Law prove that God requires the first homage of our hearts, and

the first fruits of our deliberate actions to be offered to Him. We are commanded (Eccles. xiii.), *to love him all the days of our life*. The first that descended from heaven to consume the sacrifice of Aaron was an emblem that denoted and inculcated this great duty ; for, as by the express orders of God, that sacred fire was to be fed both day and night, and to be preserved constantly burning on the altar of the Tabernacle, so, in like manner, charity, or the love of God, which is the sacred fire that Jesus Christ brought down with Him from heaven, and which is infused into our souls by the Holy Ghost at the time of our baptism, ought to be constantly kept alive and nourished both day and night on the altar of our hearts, without suffering it to be ever extinguished by mortal sin, or even its fervor to be cooled and weakened by deliberate venial sins. Hence it is that spiritual writers warmly recommended it to all Christians to excite as many devout acts of divine love as they can in the course of their life, particularly every morning and night, and at the hour of death ; a fervent act of perfect charity or divine love being the most holy action that man can perform in this life, and so meritorious in the sight of God that, with a desire of the sacrament, it is capable of blotting out the most grievous sins in an instant. Let us now proceed to the second point and second branch of charity, or the love of our neighbor.

The love of our neighbor is an extension of the same divine virtue by which we love God, and has so necessary a connection with the love of God, that we cannot fulfill the first precept of charity, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God*, without the second, *Thou shalt love thy neighbor* ; for, as in loving our neighbor for God's sake, and upon God's account, we cannot but love God at the same time in the person of our neighbor, so in like manner, if we truly love God we cannot but love our neighbor, who is created after the image and likeness of God, redeemed with the precious blood of His beloved Son, and destined to inherit His eternal glory. God's infinite goodness is the motive both of the love of our neighbor and of the love of God, as they are branches of the same virtue of charity ; and consequently, to separate one from the other, is to destroy both the one and the other, and to have no divine charity at all ; as, to divide the motive of faith, by believing one revealed truth and rejecting another equally revealed by the same divine authority, would be to destroy the virtue of faith, and to have no divine faith at all. Hence St. John says (1 Ep. iv.): *If any man say, I love God,*

and hateth his brother, he is a liar ; for he that loveth not his brother, whom he seeth, how can he love God, whom he seeth not ?

It was a common error among the carnal Jews, who in several points gave a false interpretation to the Law, to confine the love of their neighbor to their friends and relations, to people of their own nation and religious profession, and to exclude all others. Our Blessed Saviour was pleased to correct this mistaken notion, and to teach them, in the beautiful parable of the Samaritan, that charity and brotherly love is not confined or limited, but general and universal, and that it extends itself to all men, whether they be friends or foes, whether they be of the same country and religion, or of a different nation and profession—Matt. v. ; Luke vi. It is true, there is a certain order in charity to be observed in the concurrence of different persons, who are in real necessity and in equal want of assistance ; for in this case a preference is due to those with whom we have the greatest ties of justice, and who are nearest allied to us in blood, or *of the same household*, as St. Paul speaks—Galat. vi. 10. But charity does not stop here ; it extends itself, according to its abilities, to all mankind, without exception or reserve. Our Divine Redeemer seems to have had nothing more at heart than a due observance of the precept of fraternal love and charity ; He began and ended His mission with instructions concerning it ; He called it a new commandment and His own favorite law (John xiii. and xv.), and He chose it to be the badge and characteristic that was to distinguish His Disciples from the rest of mankind. *It is hereby*, said He, *that all men shall know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another*. The Apostles, therefore, took care to inculcate the duty of fraternal love above all things, both by word and example ; and the primitive Christians lived in such perfect union, peace, and harmony, in the infancy of the Church, that one heart seemed to enliven their bodies, and one soul to preside over all their actions, as St. Luke informs us—Acts, iv. The pagans, who hated their religion, admired their charity, and, as Tertullian relates, were often heard to say with surprise : *See how the Christians love each other !* Their belief, their doctrine, their Gospel, is to love their neighbor and to do good to all men ! How little, alas ! of this divine virtue is to be seen now-a-days in the world ! Was rancor, animosity, and jealousy ever carried to a higher degree than at present ? Would one imagine that the Christians of this age are the descendants of the faithful of the primitive Church ? Would not one be inclined to believe that days are already arrived in which, as

Christ our Lord predicted, *the charity of man would grow old, that iniquity would abound*, and that men would be entangled in wars and quarrels, and live in broils and dissensions, hating, persecuting, destroying and killing one another ?

Reason itself dictates, that men who live together in society, should do no wrong or injury to each other, but mutually assist and be serviceable to one another. They should imitate that love and union that subsists between the members of the same natural body, which do not disagree among themselves, but all combine to give mutual assistance, as St. Augustine remarks. These are the duties which humanity has engraved in the bottom of our hearts, and which the all-wise Creator has implanted in our souls. The Christian religion requires still something more noble, more sublime, more elevated, and more perfect than what nature inspires ; for, as St. Augustine says, *It has perfected nature in regard to charity*, and directs Christians to look upon each other as fellow-members of the same mystical body, whereof Jesus Christ is the head. The model and rule by which it orders us to regulate the love we owe to our neighbor, is the love of ourselves, because, of all loves this is the strongest, the most sincere, the most constant, the most durable, and the most extensive. We are commanded to love him, not *for ourselves*, or for our own interest, but *as ourselves*. We are not commanded to love him as one friend loves another, because human friendship is apt to dissolve and dwindle away ; nor as one brother loves another, because brotherly love often changes into a mutual hatred ; nor as a father loves a son, or a son his father ; for we see in the world but too many examples of enmity and rancor, that stifle all the tender sentiments of natural love between parents and their children. The love we are commanded to have for our neighbor must be similar to the love we have for ourselves. This is what is meant by the words, *Love thy neighbor as thyself* ; they do not imply an equality of love, but only a resemblance, for charity well ordained begins with ourselves, and then flows upon all that bear the image of God, and are redeemed with the blood of Jesus Christ. We must, therefore, learn first to love ourselves, as St. Augustine observes (Serm. 368) ; for if we do not know how to love ourselves, how shall we be able to love our neighbor as ourselves ? It is to be observed, then, that there are two different kinds of love of ourselves. The one is a vicious, criminal love of ourselves and of our bodies, that moves us to gratify our sensuality, curiosity, and pride ; it is governed by passion, grounded on the depraved inclinations of nature,

and makes us only seek and consult in everything our own ease, pleasure, and interest ; like a weight, it draws away the heart from the love and allegiance it owes God to the love of created objects. It is of this blind and inordinate self-love that Christ says in the Gospel : *He that loves his soul shall lose it.* The other kind of love of ourselves is a just and holy love of ourselves and of our souls, which is directed by reason and religion, and which makes us hate sin, subdue our passions, mortify the flesh, and deny our own will, whatever pleasure it craves contrary to the will of God. To love ourselves with any other love than this is, in reality, to hate ourselves, because it is the way to render ourselves objects of God's hatred, liable to eternal punishment hereafter. This made St. Augustine say (Ep. 176) : *No man can be truly said to love himself unless he loves and serves God.* It is of this holy and spiritual kind of love that the Gospel speaks when it assigns the love of ourselves for the standard and the model we must follow in loving our neighbor ; we are to wish and desire unto him all the real happiness and good that we wish and desire unto ourselves, according to reason and the law of God ; we are chiefly to wish him such good things as regard his future happiness and eternal salvation. In short, *we are to do by him as we would be done by* (Luke vi. 31) ; for, according to the remark of St. Gregory, the divine precept of charity comprehends these two great principles of the law of nature : Not to do to another what with reason and in justice we would not have done to ourselves ; but on the contrary, to do unto him what in the order of wisdom and justice we would have done to ourselves were we in his situation.

These are principles which no one contradicts. The Mahometan, the Jew, and the Gentile agree herein with the Christian. However, there is a wide difference between the love which the Gospel commands, and the natural love, human affection and friendship, which, as our Blessed Saviour tells us (Matt. v.), subsists amongst the heathens, who are void of divine charity. A love that is influenced by flesh and blood, and grounded only on human respect and principles purely natural, is not sufficient for the disciples of Christ. His favorite precept is not fulfilled by any of those different kinds of love which take their birth from selfish, mercenary views, and look no farther than at the private interest, profit, pleasure and conveniency that may accrue from a neighbor. No, my brethren, we must raise our thoughts higher, if we have a mind to arrive at the holy love of charity, which is a pure, spiritual and disinterested love of sincere amity and benevolence. God himself is the

motive of it ; it always regards Him in the good it wishes and does to others ; it studies only to please Him, and seeks no other reward. It is not a mere barren speculative love, that sits only on the tongue, and consists in empty compliments, vain offers of service, idle protestations of friendship, or verbal assurances that we wish our neighbor no harm and bear him no ill-will. No, Christians, the love that God commands is an active, practical love, that lodges in the heart, and manifests itself by its effects ; it inclines the soul wherein it dwells to perform offices of charity, and practices the spiritual and corporal works of mercy ; it dries up the tears of the widow and the orphan, and relieves those who are a prey to hunger and wretchedness ; it clothes the naked, visits and comforts the sick and suffering poor in cellars and garrets, and beholds them with tenderness and compassion, considering in them the person of Jesus Christ, who looks upon whatever is done to any of His little ones for His sake as done to Himself in person. In fine, the love of our neighbor is best known by what is done for him in his spiritual and temporal necessities, as the love of God is best known by a faithful compliance with our respective duties, and a regular observance of His commandments, according to these words of our Blessed Saviour : *He that keeps my commandments, he it is that loves me.* This the best sign and surest test of our charity ; this is a more satisfactory proof that we really love God and our neighbor, than any vain parade of exterior professions and verbal declarations can be ; for it is a manifest contradiction to say that we love God and our neighbor, if our works and actions speak a different language, and give the lie to our words. Let us, then, examine ourselves by this evangelical test ; let us, according to the advice of St. Augustine, sound all the secret recesses, and probe the bottom of our hearts, that we may find out the ruling principle of our actions, and discover what it is that chiefly influences and regulates all the interior motions of our souls ; whether it be a true love for God, or a blind inordinate self-love, which is diametrically opposite to and subversive of the holy love of charity. How many, alas ! are there in the very midst of Christianity, who, on looking narrowly into the state of their conscience, will find that the profane fire of concupiscence is burning on the altar of their hearts, and that the sacred fire of divine love has been totally extinguished in their souls for a long series of years, by one or more mortal sins ! How many will discover on close inspection, that they are slaves to some favorite vice, and place their last end in the object of some disorderly passion ! Yet they fancy

they love God, and even say they really do ; for, as St. Augustine observes, this is the common language of sinners as well as of the just; of the lukewarm as well as of the fervent; of the inhabitants of Babylon as well as of the citizens of Jerusalem. But their conduct proves, that in fact they only love and idolize themselves, as they have no other object in view, and refer everything ultimately to themselves without any reference to God. If they dread sin, it is not because it offends God, but because God punishes it ; if they fear hell, it is not on account of the pain of loss, or eternal privation of God, but on account of the pain of sense. The eternal flames of hell are the principal evil that alarms and terrifies them. In short, their souls are void of divine love, and only full of the deadly poison of self-love, which is an enemy to the virtue of charity, and one of the greatest obstacles to a Christian's progress in divine love; for in proportion as it is indulged and cherished in the heart it obstructs the effusions of grace and the operations of the Holy Ghost. On the contrary, in proportion as self-love is restrained and weakened by the opposite virtue of self-denial, the pure love of God will triumph and reign sovereignly in the heart, and inflame it with chaste affections. O God of Love, O Spirit of Charity, replenish our souls with this heavenly virtue. O Sun of Justice, make the light of Thy mercy shine upon us, and vouchsafe to dart a bright ray of Thy grace into our hearts, that, as the sacred fire of the Old Law was rekindled in the days of Nehamias, so, in like manner, the spiritual fire of charity may be rekindled and lit up in our souls by a speedy and sincere repentance. O may we even now begin to love Thee with our whole heart and soul, and pay off the long arrears of love we owe Thy infinite goodness. May we never cease loving and serving Thee here on earth, till we have the happiness to see and enjoy Thee in Heaven, where Charity reigns in her full lustre, and is the joy and glory of the blessed. This is the happiness that I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON THE ENORMITY AND DISMAL EFFECTS OF
MORTAL SIN.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. The healing of the lepers.
- II. The nature and enormity of mortal sin.
- III. Its dismal consequences and effects.
- IV. May God preserve all men from falling on the side of sin and eternal damnation !

Jesu, Præceptor, miserere nostri.—*St. Luc. c. xvii. v. 13.*

Jesus, our Master, have mercy on us.—*St. Luke, c. xvii. v. 13.*

THE Gospel of this day informs us, that ten poor men, covered with a leprosy, recurred to Jesus Christ for relief in their distress. The feeling sense they had of their misery made them solicitous to procure a remedy for their corporal infirmities. They were forbidden by the law of Moses to enter into the cities and towns of Judæa, for fear of spreading the infection, and communicating it to the inhabitants ; wherefore they resolved to watch on the high roads for a favorable opportunity of addressing themselves to our Blessed Saviour, and imploring His divine assistance. It happened on a certain day that He was passing through the midst of Samaria, on His way to the city of Jerusalem, in order to celebrate the feast of Tabernacles. The poor lepers having met Him on the road, to their inexpressible joy, and seeing Him ready to enter into a neighboring castle, they stood at a distance, and raising their voices together, they cried out unanimously : *Jesus, our Master, have mercy on us.* This short and humble prayer was so prevalent, that our charitable Redeemer was thereby moved to relieve them. No sooner had their unanimous petition reached His ears than it struck His tender heart, and made Him look upon them with the eyes of compassion. See, my brethren, how ready the Father of Mercies is to hear the prayers of the humble, and to grant them their request ! However, He did not cure those poor lepers on the spot, nor restore them to their perfect health in an instant, as on other occasions He was accustomed to do ; but He was pleased to command them *to go first and show themselves to the priests.* Why so ? It was, as the holy Fathers

remark, to inculcate the necessity of sacramental confession in the New Law, and to give us to understand, that it is by the ministry of the priests that God is pleased to remit and forgive sins. It was to teach us that sinners, who in a mystical sense may be called lepers, must, by a sincere and candid confession of all their sins, humbly lay open the state of their consciences to their spiritual guides and physicians, in order to have their souls cleansed and purified from the spiritual leprosy of mortal sin. The Gospel informs us also, that only one of the ten lepers who were healed returned back to thank his bountiful Benefactor for having cured him from his corporal leprosy. This poor man was a Samaritan; the other nine were Jews, and of the number of God's chosen people. The signal favor conferred on them all called upon them all for a grateful acknowledgment, yet the Samaritan alone had the gratitude to come back and give glory to God after being cleansed. Wherefore our Saviour expressed His displeasure thereat in the following words: *Were there not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? There is no one found to give glory to God but this one stranger.* His conduct herein was so pleasing to Jesus, that He granted him more than what he at first requested. He had only requested a cure for his body, and Jesus healed the disorders both of his soul and body; for He enlightened him inwardly with the light of faith, and He cleansed him from the leprosy of sin, saying to him at the same time: *Arise and go, thy faith has made thee sound.* This plainly shows that to praise and glorify God for all the benefits we receive is an indispensable duty, and a just tribute we owe the Divine Majesty for all His blessings, whether spiritual or temporal. Yet how many are there who repay the favors of Heaven with the blackest ingratitude! How few who retain a grateful remembrance of God's infinite goodness, and make Him a proper return for His boundless mercy! Were it not for this great mercy, Christians, you would have been justly condemned to the eternal flames of hell the very instant you had the misfortune to fall into mortal sin after your baptism. What thanks should you not return to the Lord your God for His patience in having spared you hitherto, and in still giving you time to repent and recover His grace, whilst thousands have been cut off the face of the earth by a sudden and unprovided death, and are now actually burning in unquenchable flames for fewer sins than, perhaps, you have committed? Are you not, then, more indebted to the mercy of God, for having thus preserved you from falling into hell, than if He had really delivered your souls

out of it? What return do you make Him for His goodness to you? Do you not resemble the ungrateful lepers? Nay, you are more insensible of your sad and deplorable condition, O sinner, when you do not recur, like them, to Jesus Christ for a remedy to heal and cleanse your soul, covered all over with the leprosy of mortal sin, which is the most dangerous of all leprosies, and the most dreadful evil that can befall a Christian in this world, as I will endeavor to show you in the following discourse. The nature and enormity of mortal sin, and its dismal effects and consequences, shall be the entire subject for your favorable attention. Let us previously invoke the divine assistance, through the intercession of the Immaculate Virgin, whom the Archangel Gabriel greeted with these words, *Ave Maria*.

Sin, in general, is a voluntary offense, or a willful transgression of God's Law, by thought, word, deed, or omission. Some sins are compared in the Scripture to a *camel*, others are compared to a *gnat*, or small insect; some are compared to a *beam*, others to a *mote* in the eye; some are compared to *wood*, others to *straw* and *stubble*, which are easily consumed. Some, it says, *the just man falls into seven times*; others it declares to be *odious and abominable* in the sight of God, and *to exclude for ever from the inheritance of His heavenly kingdom*. Hence comes the distinction between mortal and venial sin. Mortal sin is so called, because it kills the soul of the sinner, by depriving it of the life of grace, and making it liable to eternal death or damnation, which is the worst of all deaths. Venial sin is a light offense, or a small breach of the Law of God, and it is so called because it is more easily pardoned. Every sin, be it ever so small, is a great evil in itself, and ought to be carefully avoided, inasmuch as it offends God, though but lightly when compared to mortal sin. But the most pernicious and the most dangerous kind of venial sins are those which are committed deliberately, out of an evil custom, attachment, or affection; for a contempt of them cools the fervor of charity, and leads the sinner on gradually, step by step, toward the total loss of sanctifying grace, and the frightful gulf of mortal sin. The greatest things take their rise from small beginnings. A slight distemper, disregarded in the beginning, often brings on great diseases and death. A small spark neglected, frequently kindles a great fire; and drops of water gradually multiplied, will at length sink the largest ships by their number; and if a ship be lost, says St. Augustine (Ep. 118), what matter is it whether she be swallowed up in the sea all at once, or be gradually

sunk by many drops of water entering at a leak, and neglected to be pumped out? A little motion of anger indulged, led Cain, by degrees, to the horrid crime of murdering his brother; an unguarded glance of the eye, not minded, dragged on King David to the heinous sins of adultery and murder; and an inordinate attachment to money, not corrected in time, brought unhappy Judas to betray his Lord and Master.

If venial sin is, therefore, to be carefully shunned as a great and pernicious evil, it follows, of course, that mortal sin, which is the sovereign evil, as God is the sovereign good, should be shunned and detested above all things, as God ought to be sought and to be loved above all things. Mortal sin is of all things the most base, the most vile, the most odious, the most ruinous, the most detrimental, and the most abominable; it is an abomination in its own nature, and a desolation in its effects; nothing more offensive or more injurious to God; nothing more destructive or pernicious to the sinner; its malice, its enormity, and its dismal consequences are such as render it the greatest of all evils, and the most deserving of all our hatred and abhorrence. Nay, there appears something so excessively monstrous and foul in every circumstance of mortal sin, that neither thoughts can distinctly represent, nor words sufficiently express. It is evident that the grievousness of an injury always rises in proportion to the superior dignity of the person offended above the person that injures him, and therefore, to comprehend the greatness of the injury, we must not only consider what the offense itself is, but likewise who it is that is offended, and who it is that offends. We are to consider, first, if the person offended be highly exalted in dignity and merit; secondly, if the offender be very low, mean, and contemptible; and thirdly, if the offense be of its own nature very provoking. The affront that a person distinguished by the most sublime rank, and recommendable by the most eminent qualities, would receive from a man of nothing—for example, if he was trampled upon and treated with sovereign contempt by a common slave, or by one of his own menial servants—it would be judged a very horrid and enormous offense, because the disproportion and inequality between him who would give that insult and him to whom it would be given, together with the indignity of an act so contemptuous in itself, would afford some just idea of the enormity of the outrage committed. It is from this clear principle generally acknowledged, that we may judge of the atrociousness of the injury done to God by mortal sin, because all the three aforesaid circumstances which are capable of aggravating an offense meet here together in the

highest degree ; for it is God Himself, whose dignity is infinite, and whose grandeur is supreme, that is insulted and attacked, and that by a vile miserable creature, by a mere handful of dust and ashes, and by a most grievous offense. Mortal sin strikes directly at His infinite goodness, abuses His infinite mercy, defies His infinite justice, and provokes His vengeance ; malice, insolence, treachery, rebellion, perfidiousness, ingratitude, and a barefaced contempt of His divine majesty, are its inseparable attendants and properties. By mortal sin, a poor reptile of the earth impudently raises his head against Heaven, daringly wages war against the King of all Glory, audaciously flies in the face of his Creator, insolently attacks the Supreme Being, presumptuously affronts his Lord and his God, and impiously tramples upon His most sacred law. By mortal sin, a Christian perfidiously violates the covenant made at his baptism, sacrilegiously breaks the most solemn vows, treacherously dissolves the most sacred ties of fidelity, and basely strikes a league with hell, and subjects himself to Satan ; by mortal sin he repays the goodness of his Heavenly Father and most bountiful Benefactor with the blackest ingratitude, and in return for the many signal benefits, favors, graces, and blessings conferred on him in preference to thousands of others, he renews the passion and death of Jesus Christ, crucifies Him over again, and treads under his feet the precious blood of the Son of God, as St. Paul expresses it : In fine, mortal sin implies a barefaced contempt of the living God, as it is a blind preference of some created object or criminal pleasure, before the eternal and Sovereign Good, that is infinitely grand, infinitely beautiful, infinitely amiable. By every mortal sin that the sinner is guilty of, he turns his back to his best friend, he forsakes his merciful Redeemer, he parts with his Heavenly Father, to feed, like the prodigal son, on the husks of swine ; he abandons his Creator for the sake of the creature ; he quits the fountain of living water to plunge in a muddy cistern, as the Scripture speaks ; he barter heaven for earth, and more perverse than the Jews, who preferred Barabbas to Jesus, he gives the devil himself the preference before Jesus, as Tertullian remarks. Nay, as St. Augustine says, by every mortal sin that he commits, he sells his soul to the devil, and for his salary and recompense he receives nothing but a momentary satisfaction, a brutal pleasure, a filthy delight, a sordid, perishable interest. These are the idols and false gods which the unhappy sinner erects on the altar of his heart, and adores and worships there, to the great contempt and injury of the living God. This is what made the Lord

complain, through the mouth of the Prophet Isaias, i. and say : *I have reared up children, but they have undervalued and despised me ; I have left nothing undone to purchase their affections and gain their hearts, but they have dishonored me ; they have forsaken and abandoned me ; they have chosen to forfeit my grace and friendship, rather than quit their favorite sins and renounce their evil ways. Are you then surprised, my brethren, that the Lord, being thus despised, insulted, and outraged by the crying malice of mortal sin, has from time to time manifested His indignation and hatred to it, by inflicting the most severe punishments on the unhappy offenders even in this life. The universal deluge, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by showers of fire and sulphur from the heavens, with many other visible judgments recorded in Holy Writ, are indeed melancholy instances hereof ; but nothing demonstrates the horrid outrage and injury committed against the infinite majesty of God by mortal sin, nothing shows the great hatred He bears unto it more clearly than the passion and death of the world's Redeemer. Here we see that one mortal sin of disobedience was so odious, so offensive, so injurious, and so provoking to the Almighty, that the gates of heaven were thereby shut against mankind, and that nothing less than the humiliation of a person of infinite dignity was required to make condign satisfaction for it ; nothing less than the precious blood of Jesus Christ, true God and true man, was able to cancel it, or to atone for it in the rigor of justice. It is from the bitterness of the remedy, says St. Bernard, that we may form some idea of the baseness and enormity of mortal sin, and truly judge how horrid and abominable it must be in the eyes of God. And really, were it not infinitely horrid, odious, and detestable to the last degree, it would not oblige the great God, who is so prone to mercy, and whose very nature is goodness, to condemn to unquenchable flames a soul made after His own image and likeness, created to enjoy Himself for ever, and ransomed with the precious blood of His beloved Son.*

Such, notwithstanding, is the punishment reserved in the next life for the soul which departs this life in the state of a single mortal sin unrepented ; for, as the Scripture assures us, the wages and salary of sin is death—the death of the soul here, and a second death or eternal damnation hereafter ; hence the Prophet Ezechiel says (xviii. 20) : *The soul that sinneth shall die.* Though incorruptible in her nature, and immortal in her own substance, she dies in the presence of God, and becomes more loathsome and offensive than a putrified carcass, from the very

instant that she loses God and His grace by mortal sin ; for, as it is the soul of man that gives life to the body, so it is the grace of God that gives life to the soul, and consequently, as the body dies when the soul departs out of it, so, in like manner, the soul dies as soon as it is deprived by mortal sin of the supernatural life of sanctifying grace. This made St. Augustine say, that a sinner in the state of mortal sin carries a corpse within himself wherever he goes, inasmuch as he carries a dead soul in a living body, buried therein as in a grave, and exposed every instant to the danger of being buried in hell. O that I was able, cries out this holy doctor, to raise such unfortunate sinners to the happy life of God's grace, and to make them as solicitous for the preservation of the supernatural life of their souls, as they generally are for the preservation and recovery of the transitory life of their perishable bodies ! But, alas ! every one dreads the death of his body ; few dread the death of their souls. Mortal man labors incessantly to stave off his corporal death, though he knows it to be unavoidable, and in the interim he takes little or no pains to fly from mortal sin, though it is the greatest and most dreadful misfortune that can ever happen to a Christian in this world.

To be more fully convinced hereof, we need but consider that whilst a Christian is in the happy state of grace, his soul is a favorite of Heaven, an object of God's complacency, and a living temple and sanctuary of the Holy Ghost ; it is embellished with His heavenly gifts and blessings, enriched with virtues and merits, enlivened with faith, animated with hope, inflamed with divine love, and resembles Jesus Christ by the happy union it has with Him, as iron, when it is penetrated and inflamed with fire, resembles the fire itself, and glows and shines with its heat and brightness. But no sooner is mortal sin committed, but the soul is rendered a sink of filth and corruption, and a receptacle of Satan ; she immediately loses all her former beauty and splendor, fervor, and lustre ; she is stripped of all her rich and valuable ornaments ; she is robbed of all her spiritual treasures ; she is disfigured, profaned, and polluted ; she is reduced to a state of poverty and nakedness, and brought to the lowest ebb of misery and wretchedness ; all her accumulated merits are instantly swept away much after the same manner that a plentiful harvest is at once swept away by a sudden inundation ; for, as the Prophet Ezekiel says (xxviii.) : *If the just man withdraws himself from his justice, the virtues he has practiced shall be no more remembered.* By falling into mortal sin he becomes God's enemy, a slave of Satan, a con-

federate of hell, a child of perdition ; in fine, he loses God and His grace, the merits of his past good works, and the glory of Heaven for ever and ever, if he happens to die in that unhappy state ; for it is an article of faith, no less certain than terrifying, that God in His justice has decreed an eternity of torments in hell for every mortal sin that is not washed off the soul by a true and sincere repentance in this world. The unfortunate sinner, therefore, who departs this life in the state of mortal sin unrepented, may bid an everlasting farewell to the kingdom of Heaven, into which nothing that is defiled can enter ; he may bid an eternal adieu to the beatific vision of the ever blessed Trinity ; hell is to be the place of his abode for ever and for ever ; infernal spirits are to be his perpetual companions ; incomprehensible torments are to be his everlasting inheritance ; to burn with merciless devils in unquenchable flames of fire is to be his portion for a never-ending eternity. Such, my dearest brethren, are the dismal consequences of mortal sin, which clearly prove how offensive and injurious it must be to God, and how detrimental and destructive to the sinner himself.

Should we not conclude, then, that it is our own great interest, as well as our indispensable duty, to fly from it as from the face of a venomous serpent ? Should we not resolve from this instant, rather to suffer the most cruel death than ever to be guilty of mortal sin, either in thought, word, or deed ? Should not those who have had the misfortune at any time in their past life to fall into that deplorable state be always humble in their own eyes, and incessantly use their best endeavors to regain the love and friendship of their injured Creator, and recover the valuable treasure of His sanctifying grace, by a true and sincere repentance ? In the primitive ages of Christianity, one mortal sin was deemed sufficient to make a sinner do penance all the days of his life, and for this reason the canons of the Church formerly enjoined on penitents a rigorous fast on bread and water for the space of seven, ten, nay, fourteen or fifteen years, for the expiation of a single mortal sin. O what deep impressions should not the consideration of these great truths make on the hearts and minds of those sinners who make so little account of committing sin, that, according to the Scripture phrase, *they drink iniquity like water*, and continue whole years together in the state of as many mortal sins, perhaps, as they have hairs on their heads, though they know not but the first time they close their eyes to sleep they may never unclosé them but to view the flames of hell, nor return to their senses but to feel unspeakable torments ! Is it not stupendous that

Christians can sleep thus unconcerned in the arms of perdition, surrounded by as many dangers as they have committed sins, and pursued by as many executioners of God's justice as there are devils in hell, who only expect the final sentence of the Sovereign Judge to arrest and torment their souls for ever ! St. Thomas of Aquin says, he cannot comprehend how a Christian can be at rest, or even laugh and divert himself, whilst his conscience tells him he is in the state of mortal sin, since the sword of God's avenging justice is in the interim continually hanging over his criminal head, and threatening every instant to strike the fatal blow, and cut the slender thread of life by which he is suspended over the mouth of hell. The dreadful catastrophe of numberless sinners who are every day surprised and cut off the face of the earth in the midst of their iniquities, the menaces of Heaven, the fear of God's justice, the uncertainty of the hour of death, the many obstacles and difficulties that attend a death-bed conversion, the dreadful judgment that ensues, and the never-ending eternity that depends on the issue of it, are more than sufficient to deter us all from living a single hour in the state and affection of mortal sin. We should seek God, by a speedy and sincere repentance, the very time we have the misfortune to lose Him by sin, without suffering a moment to intervene between our rise and our fall. We should endeavor to make our peace with our injured Creator, and have immediate recourse to His mercy, as soon as we offend His goodness, since otherwise His justice may overtake us when we least expect it, and strike our names out of the book of life for ever.

There is not, there cannot be a more dangerous illusion, my brethren, than to procrastinate your conversion upon a project of repenting in the end of your life. No time is more unfit or improper to begin so arduous a task. Many impediments may occur then that may prevent the very possibility of repenting, or even of bestowing one serious reflection on the eternal salvation of your souls. A malignant fever, or some other violent disorder may, perhaps, derange your reason, and render you incapable of partaking of the favorable supports of religion, or reaping any benefit from the holy sacraments of the Church. The only time you can depend on, the only favorable time for you to set about this important work is the present time, whilst you are in health, in your perfect senses, and capable of making some regular preparation, and complying with all the duties of a Christian penitent. Let no one be deceived with false hopes, or flatter himself with the notion that it is never too late to repent ; for though a true repentance never comes too

late, yet, as St. Augustine says, a late repentance is seldom true and sincere ; for men generally die as they live ; their death is commonly of a piece with their life. Such as the tree is, such also is the fruit. Such as the grain is that is sown in the earth, such likewise is the crop. A man who dies is compared in Holy Writ to a tree that falls. The tree, as St. Bernard observes, commonly falls on that side which has the greatest quantity of branches, as it inclines mostly toward that side. In like manner, sinners commonly fall whatever way they mostly incline. If they follow the natural bent of their evil inclinations without control or restraint, and habituate themselves to drunkenness, impurity, cursing, swearing, and blaspheming, in all probability they will fall on that side, and die as they live, drunkards, lechers, cursers, swearers, and blasphemers. The evil habits to which they are attached, and the favorite vices to which they are addicted, and which they take little or no pains to conquer, will, it is to be feared, follow them to the grave, and accompany their souls to the bar of Divine Justice, there to rise up in judgment against them and plead their condemnation. O may God, in His infinite mercy, preserve every one in this congregation from an experimental knowledge of the like misfortune. For this end, my brethren, let me conjure you by the bowels of Jesus Christ, never to live in a state in which you would be afraid to die. Let the just, who are in the happy state of grace, guard most carefully against everything that might occasion them to fall. Let those who, on looking into their consciences, find that they are involved in the state of mortal sin, be alarmed at their deplorable situation, and resolve from this instant not to harbor that foul monster and poisonous viper any longer within their breasts. Let them throw themselves, without further delay, at the feet of God's mercy, with contrite and humbled hearts, before the gate of mercy is shut in their faces. We prostrate ourselves before Thee, O Father of Mercies and God of all consolation. We most humbly beseech Thee to grant the great gift of final perseverance to those who are already in the state of grace, that nothing either in life or death may ever separate them from the love of Thee, or engage them to depart from the ways of justice and forfeit their innocence. Vouchsafe to open the eyes of such as unhappily labor under the guilt of mortal sin, that, becoming sensible of their miserable situation, they may conceive an ardent desire of being freed from their bondage, and restored to the sweet liberty of Thy children. O may we all begin from this hour to devote the remainder of our days to Thy service, till we have the happiness to see and enjoy

Thee in the sacred mansions of eternal bliss. Which I wish you, my brethren, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON THE JOYS AND GLORY OF HEAVEN.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. The rewards of Heaven.
- II. Heaven should be the object of our desires and wishes.
- III. Heaven should be the object of our labors.
- IV. An exhortation to battle for the celestial Jerusalem.

Querite primum regnum Dei et iustitiam ejus.—St. Matt. c. vi. v. 33.

Seek first the kingdom of God, and his justice.—St. Matt. c. vi. v. 33.

WHAT a grand and important research is it, my brethren, to seek the kingdom of God and His justice? This is, without doubt, an occupation the most worthy of a Christian, and to inspire us with courage and resolution our Blessed Saviour holds out to our view a never-fading crown of glory, and promises His faithful servants a very great reward in heaven after the toils and labors of this mortal life. *Be glad and rejoice*, He says (Matt. v. 12), *for your reward is very great in heaven.* It was by the hope of this great reward that all the saints were animated to spend their days here in the most laborious exercises of penance, and the practice of the most heroic virtues. *Expecting the blessed hope, and the coming of the great God*, as the Scripture says, they contended to enter in at the narrow gate, and to carry the kingdom of Heaven by a holy violence to corrupt nature; their glorious examples should contribute very much to influence our conduct, and to excite us to walk in their footsteps, and to labor with assiduity and perseverance for the acquisition of the same happiness which they now enjoy. In vain do you allege your own frailty and weakness, for the saints were mortal men as you are; they had the same passions to conquer, the same obstacles to surmount, the same enemies—the devil, the world, and the flesh—to combat, and you have the same succors they had. You have the same faith to direct you, the same Gospel to follow, the same duties to discharge, and the same reward to hope for; you

have been made for heaven like them, to labor strenuously here, and to enjoy your Maker for all eternity hereafter. As this is the foundation of your hopes, so it should be the term of your wishes and the end of all your actions and pursuits. What will it avail you to be attached to the enjoyments of this transitory life, and to labor like slaves for the convenience of a few moments, if you leave eternity to the hazard ! What will it avail you to gain the whole world, if you swerve from the end of your creation, and lose your souls ! Does not the whole series of our redemption suppose that the heart of every Christian ought to be strongly possessed with this great principle, that his chief business on earth is to love and serve God in this life, and to aim at being eternally happy with Him in the next ? To impress your minds deeply with these sentiments, permit me, for your greater encouragement, to engage your attention at present with the consoling prospect of the glorious rewards that await the servants of God in the kingdom of Heaven. In the first point I will show you that heaven ought to be the principal object of your wishes and desires ; and in the second, that heaven ought to be the grand subject of your labors and pursuits. Let us first implore the Divine assistance, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, &c. *Ave Maria.*

The many miseries and tribulations which we experience from the cradle to the coffin prove that this world is not our home, but a place of exile and a vale of tears for the unhappy sons of Eve. Yet, alas ! for the most part, they resemble the thoughtless children of Israel, who, being born in the captivity of Babylon, had no desire or notion of returning to Jerusalem, their native country, but grew fond of their bondage, and fell in love with their chains. If we consult religion, we shall not only be convinced of the strange blindness and lamentable insensibility of such preposterous conduct, but also be furnished with sentiments more noble and more sublime. The Gospel proposes to us an eternity of bliss in the kingdom of Heaven as a most desirable object, and the most deserving of our attention and highest esteem. It unmasks the imposture of all worldly allurements, and lays open the vanity of all terrene objects ; it exhibits to our view the Saviour of mankind with diadems of glory in His hand, inviting His faithful servants to enter into the joys of their Lord, and to receive the crown of immortality which He purchased for them by the effusion of His precious blood. Is not this animating prospect capable of inspiring us with a noble disdain of all the fading vanities of this miserable Babylon, and

of making us frequently aspire to our native country, heavenly Jerusalem, in imitation of the Royal Prophet, whose soul frequently longed and thirsted for the court and palace of the Lord, as the hart pants and thirsts after the water-brooks, according to the expression of the Holy Scriptures?

The Scripture, to accommodate itself to our weakness, sketches out a draught of heavenly Jerusalem, and represents it under the notion of those things which are valued and admired most here below. St. John, in the Apocalypse, tells us that the walls of this charming mansion of bliss are of precious stones; its streets are pure and transparent gold; its water is the river of life, more clear than crystal, and ever flowing; its light is such that it needs neither sun or moon, for God Himself shall be its light for ever. O celestial Jerusalem, *thou city of God*, cries out King David, *how lovely are thy tabernacles, and what glorious things are said of thee?* Whole volumes have been written by inspired men to display the wonders of its perfections. All that is rich, grand, and resplendent in the creation has been called in to aid our conceptions and to elevate our ideas; but, after all, it must be acknowledged that no tongue can express, no person can describe, no fancy can imagine the beauty, the splendor, the grandeur, and magnificence of this glorious and divine abode. The great St. Paul, who was wrapt up to the third heaven, tells us that there are such transcendant glories there *as the eye has not seen*, such transports of pleasure *as the ear has not heard*, and such a fullness of joys *as the heart of man cannot conceive*. The light of the sun, and the fixed stars, and all the glories of this universe, are but faint shadows, feeble representations, and weak glimmerings of the incomparable splendors which encompass the throne of God on every side; there is light behind light; there is glory within glory. It is certain that our imaginations cannot be carried too high when we speak or think of the splendor and magnificence of that glorious and heavenly palace, where the whole art of creation has been employed to manifest the divine power and wisdom in the most magnificent manner; for what must be the architecture of infinite power under the direction of infinite wisdom? With what skill, with what glorious designs must that sacred habitation be beautified, where omnipotence and omniscience have so singularly exerted themselves! How great must be the majesty of that kingdom where the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords appears in perfect majesty, and discovers Himself in the fullness of His glory to the celestial hosts and angelic choirs? If He has made these

lower regions so extensive and magnificent for the habitation of mortal and perishable beings, how extensive and magnificent must be the superior regions of heaven, where, as the Prophet Daniel tells us (c. vii.), *thousands of thousands, and ten thousand times hundreds of thousands of angels and saints perpetually surround the seat of bliss*, with sweet alleluias and canticles of praise ! O could we for a moment draw aside the veil that interposes, and throw a single glance on these divine abodes, how soon would all sublunary possessions become tarnished in our eyes, and grow flat upon our taste ! One transient glimpse would be sufficient to captivate our souls and engross all our faculties, in such a manner that Eden itself, after such a vision, would appear a cheerless desert, and all earthly charms would seem intolerable deformity.

However, though the kingdom abounds thus with an assemblage of all that can be imagined good, grand, and delightful, without the least mixture of evil, yet it is not in all this, but in the clear vision and eternal enjoyment of God Himself that the principal recompense of virtue and the essential happiness of the blessed spirits in glory consists ; they see God there *face to face*, as He truly is in Himself, and are more sensible of His divine presence than we are of the presence of those whom we look upon with our eyes ; they see Him clearly in the very centre of their souls, and by the eternal contemplation of His infinite beauty, goodness, and other divine attributes and perfections, they are quite inflamed and enraptured ; they shine and glow with His brightness, and are set on fire with seraphic flames of love. This love transforms them, in a manner, into the beloved object, and by a wonderful union puts them in possession of God Himself, and consequently in possession of all His perfections ; it makes them resemble and become like unto Him, as iron cast into a furnace, and inflamed with fire, resembles and becomes like unto fire itself. O happy souls ! What can be wanting to satiate their desires and complete their joy, who thus have within and without them a vast ocean of felicity, with an absolute certainty that this felicity shall be as lasting as an endless eternity. Thousands of years pass away there like a day, and each day gives them the joy of thousands of years !

It is this lasting, this unspeakable happiness, that I propose to your consideration, when I speak to you of the joys of heaven. O my brethren, what a blessed and desirable object is this ! How glorious ! How charming ! How worthy of a Christian soul to covet and thirst after ! Must we not be insensible to the last degree, if we forfeit such

unutterable beatitude for a sordid interest, for a vile pleasure in sin ? O let us remember that we are created for a nobler end, born to higher hopes, and invited to a glorious state of immortality. Did we but make it our business to consider attentively what it is to dwell for ever in Paradise with God and His angels and saints, to converse eternally with the Fountain of all goodness and sweetness, to warble everlasting praises to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, to live in perpetual raptures and ecstasies of joy and love ; such pious reflections would make us blush at our past indifference, negligence, and tepidity, and cause a holy ardor to glow in our breasts. They would inspire us with vigor and activity in the service of God, sweeten every toil and labor, and carry us with pleasure through all the weary stages of our duty.' In short, we would become all life, spirit, and wing, and be wonderfully animated to run with alacrity, as well as with patience, the race that is set before us, as the Apostle speaks ; for every thing appears light and easy to a Christian who has a heaven of endless and incomprehensible joys always in view.

It was this blessed prospect that sweetened the rigorous austerities, fasts, and mortifications of thousands of Christians in the primitive ages, and that turned the flames of martyrdom into a bed of roses. What tortures has not the barbarity of tyrants formerly invented to torment a St. Laurence, a St. Andrew, a St. Stephen, and numberless others ! They were raised on gibbets, fastened to crosses, extended on wheels, plunged into caldrons of boiling oil, broiled on gridirons and burning coals, and yet, in the midst of all their excruciating pains, what had they in their mouths but canticles of joy and thanksgiving, and prayers for their cruel persecutors ! From whence came this courage, this strength more than human ! It was because they beheld the heavens open over their heads. They beheld Jesus Christ, their Chief, presenting them with crowns and palms of glory. At this sight, at this consoling prospect, they lost all other feeling. The hope of reigning eternally with Jesus Christ in the kingdom of Heaven, sweetened the bitter chalice of their sufferings ; this was the cordial that gave them new life and spirits, supported them under their severe trials, made every labor seem light, every pain delightful, and rendered death, in its most terrifying shape, desirable and acceptable to them. Hence the Scripture relates that the zealous mother of the seven brothers, Machabees, who suffered a most cruel martyrdom under King Antiochus, cried out to the youngest of her seven sons in the midst of his torments : *O my*

child, look up to Heaven and take courage ; suffer with constancy for a little while, that you may be happy for ever with your God ; your sufferings will soon have an end, and a crown of glory will be the prize of your victory, and your great recompense for an endless eternity.

O let me entreat you, in like manner, my brethren, to have your faces ever turned toward heavenly Jerusalem, and to make it the principal object of your most sanguine desires, and the grand subjects of your labors and pursuits. Never, says St. Augustine, never lose sight of that blessed country for which you have been created. Raise your thoughts frequently above this world, and ascend in spirit into that true Land of Promise which your Blessed Redeemer has purchased for you at the expense of His blood. Take a serious view of that sacred mansion of bliss, and nothing will be able to shake your constancy, or prevail on you to depart from your duty. You will not grow weary in the service of God, nor betray such sloth and reluctance in complying with the precepts of the Church, and discharging the obligations of your respective states, if you have the immense joys of Heaven always before your eyes.

The laborer would faint in the vineyard if he was not cheered by the sight of the recompense he expects to receive. When you look up to the great recompense that is in store for the servants of God, you will account as nothing all the troubles and pains you undergo in this life for the sake of obtaining life everlasting. Every thing you do and suffer on this account will appear no more than a shadow, that bears no manner of proportion with a happy immortality. Nay, you will be astonished that the Divine bounty grants so great a salary, so immense a reward for so little labor, for such trifling pains. To obtain eternal rest would deserve eternal labor ; to purchase a happiness without bounds, we should be willing to suffer for ages. Yet God, in His great mercy, does not require us to labor so much, or to suffer so long. He does not require a million or a thousand years, or even five hundred ; but only desires us to labor the few years that we live on earth, during which He promises that the dew of His consolations shall not be wanting, and assures us that He will afterward recompense our labors and our patience with a glory that has no end. He does not say, you shall not be partakers of my kingdom, unless you withdraw yourselves from all society, unless you distribute all your worldly substance among the poor, unless you spill your blood for my sake, unless you perform many great and extraordinary exploits ; but He has declared in the Gospel

His acceptance of the widow's mite, and He has promised us His kingdom upon the most easy terms, and for the smallest good works, even for a cup of cold water given for the love of His blessed name, and for a moment of light and supportable tribulations suffered for His sake. He is satisfied with the perfection of our ordinary actions and common duties. He requires of us but a virtuous life, which the whole world may easily practice with the aid of His grace, and the practice of which contributes even to render this present life more pleasant and more comfortable, since, as the Scripture says : *A good conscience is a continual feast*. O how happy, then, are we, my brethren, to have so good a Father to deal with ! What a pleasure, what a comfort it is to serve so bountiful a master, who does not overlook the least good action that we do, but grants the greatest of all blessings to His faithful servants, and infallibly crowns with glory those who persevere to the end ! What greater encouragement can we desire to make good use of our time, to embrace every favorable opportunity of merit that we daily meet with in our respective states, and to treasure up for ourselves incorruptible treasures in heaven, before we are overtaken by the fatal night of death ! Where is our faith, where is our zeal, if we continue any longer in a cold indifference for Heaven, and blindly place our happiness in the transitory enjoyments of this present life ! O children of men, cries out the Royal Psalmist, how long will you be heavy of heart ? Why do you love vanity and seek after lies ? Shall nothing but woeful experience open your eyes, and make you sensible of the folly of pursuing empty shadows, trifling toys, gilded phantoms, and painted bubbles ? O could you but hear the woes and lamentations of those unhappy souls who heretofore placed their last end in created objects, and now justly feel the weight of God's vengeance in the unquenchable flames of hell, you would be soon disabused and stand convicted of your error ; for they would tell you that it is downright folly and madness to fix your hearts and affections on the false security of temporal advantages ; they would tell you that those who seek their happiness here below are woefully mistaken, and will meet with nothing but disappointment in the end ; for though they should enjoy whatever this world can afford, the most pleasing and the most delightful, if at the hour of death they change their shining apartments on earth for a grave in the gloomy regions of hell, all their past pleasures and enjoyments will serve only to renew the sad remembrance that it was once in their power to obtain the kingdom of Heaven. On the contrary, though all

the miseries and sufferings that ever befell the whole species of human nature should be centered in one person, if in the end he saves his soul and gains the glory of Heaven, he must be pronounced happy for all eternity.

What can rouse you, my brethren, from your insensibility, if all this does not? Will you labor incessantly to acquire perishable riches, and to rise and flourish in this world, and take no pains to purchase the joys of Heaven and merit crowns of immortal glory? If the labor deters you, O let the great reward animate you, cries out one of the Fathers of the Church. Remember that *the labor is short, the recompense eternal*. Remember that heaven is worth infinitely more than you are able to do or suffer for it. All your pretended difficulties and imaginary hardships will soon vanish like a shadow, if in your spiritual combats, sufferings, and penitential exercises the thoughts of eternal glory be always present to your mind. It will encourage you to undertake every thing, to undergo every thing, to accomplish every thing for the sake of enjoying God for ever in His heavenly kingdom; for if the hopes of enjoying Rachael made fourteen years hard labor appear sweet and agreeable to the Patriarch Jacob; if the prospect of possessing a country overflowing with milk and honey raised the drooping spirits of the children of Israel, and animated them to undertake and pursue a most painful journey of forty years through the desert, shall not the hopes of enjoying God in the true Land of Promise, and of seeing His glorious and beautiful majesty for all eternity be sufficient to inspire us with courage and resolution to surmount every difficulty that attends a virtuous life, and to perform with alacrity every duty that religion dictates and prescribes? O celestial Jerusalem! may we forget ourselves before we forget that thou art our inheritance and our blessed hope. O may we reject with Christian disdain all the solicitations of this sinful Babylon, and despise all the fleeting joys of this transitory life. O may we make thee the chief object of our contemplation, the centre of our desires, the grand subject of our labors, the principle of our joy and consolation during the time of our mortal pilgrimage here on earth. O God of all glory! God of all goodness! Fountain of all sweetness! when shall we come and appear before Thee in that happy kingdom, where Thou art the crown and the great reward of Thy servants! O when shall we arrive in the lovely tabernacles of Thy glory, and contemplate Thy infinite beauty, face to face, without the interposition of either cloud or mist! O give us grace, we beseech Thee, to comply

with the conditions that are necessary on our part, in order to be entitled to eternal happiness. Strengthen our faith, increase our hope, inflame our charity, and grant us the great gift of final perseverance, that being enriched with the treasures of Thy grace here, we may be replenished with the riches of Thy glory hereafter. Which is the blessing I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON THE HAPPY STATE OF GRACE, AND THE UNHAPPY STATE OF SIN.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. What the raising to life of the widow's son, near Naim, teaches.
- II. Advantages of living in the happy state of grace.
- III. Means to recover the grace and friendship of Almighty God.
- IV. An exhortation to sinners, inviting them to return to grace.

Et resedit, qui erat mortuus, et cœpit loqui.—*St. Luc. c. vii. v. 15.*

And he that was dead, sat up, and began to speak.—*St. Luke, c. vii. v. 15.*

THE subject of this day's Gospel is a renowned miracle wrought by our Saviour, in favor of a widow's son whom He was pleased to raise to life, near the city of Naim, in Galilee ; for, as the Evangelist informs us, when Jesus on a certain day was approaching with His disciples near the gate of the aforesaid city, He met a multitude of people accompanying the funeral of a young man lately deceased. Having observed among the crowd, the disconsolate mother of the young man following the corpse with an aching heart, and lamenting the death of her only son with a flood of tears, the tender bowels of His infinite mercy were moved to compassion and so sensibly affected, that He desired her to desist from weeping, and went over toward the bier on which the corpse lay, and, having touched it with His sacred hands, He said : *Young man, I say to thee, rise up ;* which words he had no sooner pronounced, than the dead man immediately came to life, sat up, opened his eyes, and began to speak in the hearing of the astonished multitude, to the inexpressible joy of the poor widow, his mother, who

glorified God for having raised her son to life and restored him to her in perfect health. This afflicted mother bewailing the corporal death of her son, was a figure of our Holy Mother the Church, overwhelmed with grief and affliction for the spiritual death of as many of her children as unhappily plunge themselves into the dismal state of mortal sin ; which is called *mortal*, because it kills the soul of the sinner by depriving it of the supernatural life of sanctifying grace, and rendering it liable to eternal death and damnation, according to these words of the Scripture : *The wages and salary of sin is death* ; the death of the soul here, and a second death hereafter.

O what a dreadful evil must mortal sin therefore be ! What a frightful change does it cause in the soul of a Christian ! What a long train of misfortunes does it entail on her ! To excite you to an utter abhorrence of so foul a monster, and to a due esteem for sanctifying grace, is the design of the following discourse. In the first point, I will lay before you the signal advantages of living in the happy state of grace, and the sad consequences of falling from it into the dismal state and affection of mortal sin. In the second point, I will show you by what means the grace and friendship of God may and ought to be recovered, when unhappily forfeited by mortal sin. Let us previously implore the divine assistance, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, greeting her with the Angel. *Ave Maria.*

St. John, the beloved disciple of our Lord, could not refrain from transports of holy joy, admiration, and astonishment when he reflected on the eminent degree of honor, dignity, and happiness to which Christians are elevated at the time of their baptism by the sanctifying grace of God. *See*, cries out this Apostle, *what charity God has given us, that we are named, and in reality are raised by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ to the high rank of being the children of God !* That we should even be admitted into the number of God's servants would be an honor preferable to that of swaying a royal sceptre and wearing an imperial crown. What an incomparable honor and dignity must it then be to be raised to the rank of the children of God, and of course the friends of God and heirs of His heavenly kingdom ! Should we not conceive a due esteem for, and set the highest value on this glorious quality, this noble title, this supereminent dignity, which has been conferred on us through the merits of Jesus Christ, at the baptismal font ? Should we not labor with all possible care to support this dignity, to preserve this grace, and live up to this august character, which is far

superior to all the glory of Solomon, to all the grandeur of the greatest monarchs of the earth, and to all the temporal advantages that the world can offer us? Though we were masters of all the treasures of the earth, it would be better to risk them all, nay, even to forfeit them all, rather than hazard the loss of God's grace by mortal sin, or to fall thereby from the high rank of His children, His friends, and the heirs of His eternal kingdom. Whatever other loss we may happen to sustain, whatever other disgrace we may incur, whatever other misfortune we may meet with, it is but trifling and insignificant in comparison of the loss, misfortune, and disgrace that is incurred by falling into mortal sin. We lose nothing worthy of our regret, provided we do not lose the grace and friendship of our God. As long as we continue united to Him by sanctifying grace, we may be truly said to be rich and happy, though we should be stripped of all the goods of fortune, and of all the enjoyments of the world. As long as we continue in the happy state of grace, we find in it, in a supereminent degree, whatever the malice of our most inveterate enemy could deprive us of. In this blessed state a Christian possesses his God, who is the whole happiness of the angels and saints in heaven: In this blessed state his soul is a living temple of the Holy Ghost, embellished, beautified, and enriched with celestial gifts and blessings. In this blessed state, God is his joy, his treasure, his portion, his inheritance, his asylum, his consolation in all adversities, and in Him alone he finds all that can be the object of his most sanguine wishes and desires; so that he may then truly say with St. Francis : *My God and my All*. He may exult with the devout recluse in the desert : and say, *The world may indeed strip me of the external goods of fortune, but no one can take away my God from me.*

On the contrary, whilst a Christian is separated and divorced from God by mortal sin, he is really poor, abject, wretched, and miserable, though he should be possessed of the most ample fortune, and exalted to the highest degree of worldly honor that is attainable here on earth. From the very moment he falls into mortal sin he ceases to be the favorite of heaven, a child of God, and an heir of His eternal glory; he becomes in an instant God's enemy, an object of His hatred, a victim of His justice, a slave of Satan, and a confederate of hell. He is degraded, disinherited, and divested of all right and title to everlasting happiness. His soul is no longer a sanctuary and temple of the Holy Ghost; it is profaned and defiled by mortal sin, and rendered an abominable sink of filth and corruption. From one of the most noble

beings in the creation it becomes one of the vilest, one of the most despicable of all creatures ; it loses all its former beauty, is stripped of all its noble prerogatives, robbed of all its spiritual treasures and precious ornaments of grace, and reduced to the lowest ebb of poverty and nakedness. Nay, mortal sin reduces the unhappy sinner to a kind of nothing in the order of grace, or rather to a state absolutely worse than nothing, or that of not being at all, as King David remarked, when opening his eyes to behold the disorders of his soul, he cried out in Ps. lxxi : *O Lord, what a dreadful change has sin wrought in me, as soon as a blind passion got the better of my reason, and took possession of my heart ! I found myself by a just desertion of thy grace reduced to a mere nothing, and I did not know it.* Hence St. Paul (1 Cor. iii.) could not find a more energetic expression to represent the nature of sin than by calling it, *nothing*. If I have not charity, says he, if I am not in the grace of God, *I am nothing* ; though by the force of my faith I should transport mountains, and suffer the most racking tortures, it *avails me nothing* if I am void of charity and stripped of the grace of God. Whilst we are united to God by sanctifying grace, and ingrafted on Jesus Christ like the branches of the vine that are joined to the trunk, all the good actions that we deliberately perform are acceptable to God, and meritorious of life everlasting. Every act of virtue that we do in the interim acquires for us a new degree of grace, and entitles us to a new degree of happiness ; and, consequently, as many virtuous actions as we perform in the state grace, so many crowns of glory are reserved for us in the kingdom of Heaven. This is a consoling truth, that should engage us to live always in a state of grace, since we thereby have it in our power to amass for ourselves immense treasures of merit in heaven, and thus render ourselves eternally great, eternally glorious, eternally happy.

But alas ! it is equally true, that if we have the misfortune to incur the displeasure of God, and forfeit His sanctifying grace by mortal sin, we not only lose the merit of all our past good works as long as we continue in that unhappy state, but also we become like unto withered and lopped-off vine-branches, which draw no juice from the root, and are therefore incapable of bearing fruit ; for, as in a state of natural death, it is impossible to perform any vital function or action of life, so, in the state of spiritual death or mortal sin, we cannot perform any action of spiritual life, or meritorious of life everlasting. Hence the Prophet Ezekiel says (c. xxviii) : *If the just man withdraws himself from his*

justice, the virtues he has practiced shall be no more remembered: The Lord will make no account of them, nor recompense them in the order of glory, unless they revive and recover the life of grace by a true repentance. As for the good works that are performed in the state and affection of mortal sin, they never revive or recover the life of grace, as they were never animated by it; they are dead in the sight of God, void of condign merit, and unworthy to be entered in the book of eternal life, or ranked in the number of those virtuous actions to which the *upright Judge has promised a crown of justice*, as the Apostle speaks. However, a sinner is not for this reason to omit the practice of good works, or to neglect the duties of religion, because he has unhappily fallen; for, though the works that are done in the state of mortal sin are not worthy of God's complacency, nor meritorious of life everlasting, yet they are not altogether unprofitable, but rather of great advantage, because they may contribute to withdraw the sinner from the dismal gulf of mortal sin, and dispose him for the sacraments of reconciliation; they are the only resource he has then left, and therefore far from neglecting the practice of such works, or transgressing the general obligations of Christianity, because he is in mortal sin, he should for this very reason redouble his diligence; he should fast and pray the more, he should give more abundant alms to the poor, and apply himself with greater ardor to the practice of good works, in order to avert the wrath of God and soften His justice. Who knows, says the Prophet Jonas, if the God of mercy will not be thereby touched and engaged to look down with pity on the sinner, and grant him the grace of a true repentance. It was by such dispositions that the Ninivites averted the indignation of Heaven, and the humble publican obtained mercy and pardon; and it is also by similar means that every sinner ought to labor to rise out of the abyss of mortal sin, and reinstate himself in the grace and friendship of God, as I will show you in the sequel.

What you are to resolve upon, my brethren, when you have unhappily lost God's grace, and fallen into mortal sin, is to hasten without delay to repair your loss, and to rise from the dismal death of sin by a speedy and sincere repentance; for to defer applying this healing balsam will only serve to add to your misfortune, to widen the dreadful wounds made by sin, and to render your cure the more difficult; it will serve only to strengthen your fetters and to remove you farther from God, farther from the way of salvation. If by imprudence or mistake

you had lost the good graces of an earthly monarch, or incurred the anger of some powerful friend, to whom you are indebted for many signal favors, and who could easily oppress you with the weight of his power, would it be necessary to exhort you to have recourse to every means in your power in order to appease him, and re-establish yourselves in his favor? Your own interest, and the apprehension of feeling the effects of his anger, or of losing the advantages that might be expected from his benevolence, would sufficiently press you to recover his friendship without loss of time. If robbers had entered into your house at night, says the Prophet Abdias, v., and had carried off all that was precious and valuable therein, how great would your trouble and concern be! With what speed and diligence would you not pursue them, in order to recover what they had carried off! When you are attacked by a dangerous fit of sickness, do you not endeavor to remove the cause of your complaint, and to re-establish your health with speed, with care, and solicitude? You do not wait for the last extremity to call in a physician and apply for a remedy. You submit to the most painful cures; you swallow the bitterest pills; you suffer the sharpest operations of physic and surgery. Should you not be more diligent, more impatient, more solicitous to recover the grace of God, and the spiritual life and health of your soul? Should you not be more grieved and concerned for the loss of it than for any other loss whatever? Is it not the greatest of all losses? Is there any thing so rigorous or so painful in the salutary remedies of penance and mortification that you should not willingly undergo, in order to heal your spiritual maladies, and re-establish yourselves in that happy state of grace from which you fell? As soon as you are sensible of your fall, you should rise, with the prodigal child, and return to your God and your Heavenly Father without delay, at the first call of grace which invites you to return to Him. If you seek Him immediately, whilst He is not far distant, you may find and regain Him without any great difficulty; but if you wait until He retires far from you, it is only by extraordinary efforts that you will be able to recover His favor and friendship. Hence the Prophet Isaias says: *Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near*—lv. 6. Do not delay to answer Him as soon as He calls on you; never defer until another time to follow His inspirations. If He stretches out His hand this day to assist you, embrace the offer readily; if He strikes at the door of your heart, let Him have admittance immediately; if He casts on you a glance of His merciful eyes,

make use of it, as Peter the Apostle did, to weep bitterly for your crimes, and to wash them off by tears of a sincere repentance; for if you hesitate and let slip the precious and decisive moment of grace, you will run the risk of never meeting the same favorable opportunity again. The day, perhaps, will come when you may in vain cry out for mercy; for mercy abused is often changed into inflexible justice. Thousands of sinners have been convinced of this terrifying truth by woeful experience; relying on the deceitful hope of the time to come, and referring their conversion to a future day, as if they were masters of futurity, or could command the grace of God whenever they were willing to demand it, they have been justly disappointed; their projects have been baffled, and their vain expectations blasted; their days have been cut short, and they have been hurried out of the world by a sudden and unprovided death, at a time when they least expected it. This was the case of the five foolish virgins mentioned in the Gospel; they dallied and neglected to trim and furnish their lamps when the bridegroom called upon them, and therefore they found the gate of mercy afterward shut in their face; all their tears and entreaties were not sufficient to procure them admittance; they were justly excluded from the nuptial banquet; the bridegroom became inflexible, and condemned them to be banished out of his sight for ever.

This plainly shows how dangerous it is for a sinner to procrastinate the great work of his reconciliation with God, and reject the heavenly calls and graces, by which the Father of Mercies invites him to return speedily to a proper sense of his duty. Your God at present says to you, my brethren, by the preachers of His Gospel, what the angel formerly said to St. Peter in the prison: *Surge velociter*—Arise with speed. Throw off the shackles and fetters with which you are bound; disengage yourselves from the galling yoke of sin under which you miserably groan. Renounce those detestable habits of drunkenness, impurity, detraction, injustice, cursing, swearing, and blaspheming by which you are enslaved; sleep no longer in the arms of perdition, but rise without further delay out of the lethargy of sin, and Jesus Christ will enlighten you. He calls on you by those pious emotions which He at present excites in the bottom of your hearts; He calls upon you by those celestial rays of light which He darts on your understanding; He calls on you by the good thoughts and secret inspirations which you inwardly feel; He calls on you by the many edifying examples you behold, and by the salutary instructions and exhortations which are delivered to you from the chair

of truth. If you reject all these graces and prove deaf to all these calls, your neglect and contempt of them may, perhaps, fill up the measure of your iniquities, and put the last seal to your eternal reprobation. The Lord, provoked by your obstinacy and resistance to His gracious calls, will, perhaps, in His turn, shut His ears to your entreaties, and be deaf to your petitions when you will wish to return to Him and to implore His mercy ; He will, perhaps, refuse you His powerful assistance in the hour of your greatest distress, and let you die in your sins, according to these words of the Scripture (Prov. i. 24): *I have called upon you, and you have refused to hear me ; you have despised all my counsel, and have neglected my reprehensions ; I will also, in my turn, laugh at your destruction, and not hear your cries in the hour of your tribulation.* And again (John, vii. 34): *You shall seek me, and shall not find me ; and you shall die in your sins*—viii. 24.

If, therefore, any in this congregation should happen to be so unhappy as to be involved in the guilt and affection of mortal sin, let me conjure them to *hasten to the throne of grace with confidence, that they may obtain mercy, and find grace in seasonable aid*—Heb. iv. 16. Let me entreat them to open their eyes before they are opened by the scorching flames of hell, and to repent in time, lest they may have reason hereafter to repent in vain for a never-ending eternity. The precious blood of Jesus will cry out to Heaven for mercy, and will plead their pardon and wash away their sins, provided they sincerely unite their voice, their hearts, and penitential tears with it. O Blessed Redeemer, do not suffer us to be so ungrateful to Thee, or so cruel to ourselves, as to frustrate the designs of Thy mercy through our own obstinacy. Grant, we beseech Thee, the gift of perseverance to those happy souls which are already in the state of grace, and the gift of a true contrition to those who are laboring under the galling yoke and miserable bondage of sin, that being restored to the sweet liberty of Thy children, and being united to Thee here by grace, they may be united to Thee hereafter in the kingdom of Thy glory, for ever and ever. This is the blessing that I wish you all, my brethren, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON SANCTIFYING THE SABBATH DAY.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. Observance of the Sabbath.
- II. Its origin and institution.
- III. The proper manner of observing the Christian Sabbath.
- IV. Exhortation to observe the Sabbath day.

Factum est cum intraret Jesus in domum cujusdam principis Phariseorum Sabbatho manducare panem, et ipsi observabant eum.—St. Luc. c. xiv. v. 1.

It happened when Jesus went into the house of a certain Pharisee to eat bread on the Sabbath day, and they were watching him.—St. Luke, c. xiv. v. 1.

THE Gospel of this day shows us, on the one hand, to what extremes the Scribes and Pharisees were hurried by their excessive pride and great want of charity ; and, on the other hand, it represents to us with what patience our Blessed Redeemer bore their insolence, and with what sweetness and meekness He endeavored to reclaim them. It happened that He went into the house of a certain Pharisee to eat bread on the Sabbath day, where the Pharisees took care to be present, not with a view of listening to His heavenly instructions, but of watching His conduct and censuring His most innocent actions. He foresaw that they would be scandalized at a miracle which He was about working, and blame Him as a Sabbath-breaker for healing a man ill of a dropsy, who came to implore His divine assistance ; but neither the fear of their censures, nor the evil dispositions of their hearts, were able to hinder our charitable Redeemer from relieving the afflicted and distressed objects who had recourse to Him in their necessities, teaching us by His example that we are not to be deterred from our duty, nor drawn from the practice of good works by the apprehension of being unjustly censured and misrepresented. The evangelist tells us, that He first asked the Doctors of the Law and the Pharisees then present: *If it was lawful to heal the sick on the Sabbath day?* Then He took hold of the sick man, restored him in an instant to his perfect health, and sent him away full of joy, and penetrated with sentiments of gratitude. However, in order to remove the unjust scandal which the Pharisees had taken at this miraculous cure, He condescended so far to their weakness

as to reason them out of their error, by asking them : If an ox or an ass of their own should happen to fall into a pit, which of them would scruple drawing it out on the Sabbath day ? This question covered them with so much shame and confusion that they could make no reply in their own defense ; for their insatiable avarice, which was represented by the dropsy that our Saviour cured the poor man of, influenced their reason so far as to make them conclude that it was no violation of the Sabbath to take their ox or ass out of a ditch on that day ; but their vanity and excessive desire to distinguish themselves by an exact and rigid observance of the law, together with their want of fraternal love, made them overlook the distress of their neighbor, and deem it unlawful to cure him on the Sabbath day, under the specious pretext of piety. Thus it is that the enemy of mankind often deceives sinners with the shadow of virtue, leaving them the appearance of conscience, and persuading them to scruple at trifles, whilst they neglect the substance and transgress the most essential duties without remorse. The observance of the Sabbath is indeed an important duty ; two extremes, however, are to be carefully avoided herein. First, the rigid superstition of the Scribes and Pharisees, who were scandalized at seeing our Blessed Saviour performing works of mercy on the Sabbath day, and at His Disciples plucking a few ears of corn and eating them, when they passed through the cornfields, and were pressed with hunger. Secondly, the impiety and irreligion of those Christians, who are neither afraid nor ashamed to spend the Sabbath in drunkenness and rioting, in dissipation and licentiousness, in idle amusement and lawless practices, by which they pervert this day of grace and mercy into a day of wrath and perdition. To remedy such evils, and to excite you to a religious observance of the Christian Sabbath, is the design of the following discourse, wherein I will lay before you, first, the nature and original institution of the Sabbath ; and secondly, the manner in which the obligation of sanctifying it is to be complied with. Let us previously invoke the light and assistance of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, &c. *Ave Maria.*

Amongst the various sinful abuses and disorders that reign at present in the very midst of Christianity, there is scarce any one that seems to call more loudly on the preachers of the Gospel for an exertion of their zeal than the scandalous practice of profaning the Sabbath day. The sanctification of our souls, and the conduct of our lives the other six days of the week, depend, in a great measure, on the sanctification of

this day, because a regular observance of it would contribute very much to facilitate the observance of the other divine precepts; and, on the contrary, a constant transgression of this duty is generally attended with a total neglect and oblivion of the other great duties of religion. Nay, it is hard to conceive how people of business, servants, and other laborious Christians can be said to serve God, and to take proper care of their souls, if they do not sanctify the Sabbath day, because they are entangled in worldly cares all the remainder of the week, and engaged from morning till night in a continual drudgery, that takes their thoughts off from their spiritual duties, and hinders them from applying themselves properly to the service of the Lord their God, and to the salvation of their souls.

Permit me then, my brethren, to echo and re-echo these words of our Lord in your ears, and to imprint them deeply in your hearts: *Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day.* The very terms in which God commands us to observe this precept, indicate its singular importance; for, not content with laying a simple injunction on us, as He does in the other nine commandments, He cautions us in a particular manner by the word *remember*, which is prefixed to this commandment only, and not to the rest; and He awakes our constant attention by charging us never to forget this holy ordinance, which plainly shows that it is a law of the highest importance, and that it is to be most religiously observed. It is partly a moral and indispensable precept of the Law of Nature, and partly a ceremonial and changeable precept of the Mosaic Law. Inasmuch as it points out one particular day in preference to another to be sanctified, it is a ceremonial precept; but inasmuch as it directs us to set apart some portion of our time, or to lay out one day in the week for the practice of those religious duties which tend immediately to the worship of the Creator, such as prayer, adoration, praise, thanksgiving, and sacrifice, it is a moral and unchangeable precept of the Law of Nature; for it being impossible for us, in the present order of Providence, to employ our whole time, or to spend every day of the week in these holy exercises, the Law of Nature and the light of reason dictates that we are indispensably bound to set aside some part of our time for these sacred purposes, and to devote at least one day in the week in a special manner to the worship of our Maker, and to the spiritual concerns of our souls. Our whole time, it is true, belongs to God, and He has the strictest right to our homage every day. We owe ourselves entirely to Him; it was for the purpose of serving Him only that we have been

created, and therefore, we are to perform all our works and actions every day, in our respective states, with a view of pleasing and honoring Him, and in obedience to His holy will. Besides this general duty of referring all our worldly actions and employments to God's honor and glory, and thus making them subservient to the great affair of our eternal salvation, right reason tells us that, as we naturally allot certain proper times for the several necessities of our bodies, we should likewise allot certain proper times for the care of our souls, and for paying a special tribute of our homage and adoration to the Divine Majesty. The Law of Nature does not point out one particular time, or one certain day in the week more than another for the performance of these duties ; so that the precept of sanctifying the Sabbath in this respect is no more than a ceremonial precept, liable to be changed, both as to the particular day of the week and the particular manner of sanctifying it, ever since the Mosaic Law was abrogated by the death of our Blessed Saviour, and ceased to be any longer binding as to its ceremonial precepts. The appointment or determination of one particular day preferably to another depends on the positive ordinance of God, or of some lawful authority deriving a power from Him, to make whatever regulation or change herein, as to the fixed time, that it judges most expedient.

The Almighty God Himself, who in the space of six days had made heaven and earth and the sea, and all things therein contained, was pleased in the Old Law to determine and appoint a particular day by an express commandment. From the very beginning of the world He appointed and reserved Saturday, or the seventh day of the week, to be consecrated in a special manner to His honor, in memory of and in thanksgiving for the great benefit of the creation. He allowed mankind to employ the other six days in the management of their temporal affairs, and worldly occupations and cares ; but as these are apt to draw the thoughts of mortal men from heavenly things, and hinder them from having their minds continually fixed on God's infinite perfections in holy contemplation, like the angels and saints in heaven, He blessed the seventh day in particular, and ordered it to be kept holy ; He sanctified it, and called it the *Sabbath day*, that is, the day of rest, because He then rested from the work of the creation, or ceased from the production of any new species of creatures. However, though the Sabbath day had been thus instituted and sanctified from the very creation as the birthday of the world, yet mankind, after the fall of our first parents,

having grown languid and slothful in the service of God, the precept of keeping holy the Sabbath was shamefully neglected for the space of near two thousand five hundred years, according to the testimony of Philo, a learned Jewish historian ; for which reason it became necessary to renew and re-establish it in the Law of Moses, when the Ten Commandments were published on Mount Sinai in two tables of stone. Hence it is that the Lord then expressly said in the Third Commandment : *Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day* ; giving the children of Israel to understand by the word *remember*, that the sanctification of the Sabbath was not a new precept, but had been instituted long before that time, and reminding them of the strict obligation they were under to observe it according to its primitive institution, thereby to acknowledge God's sovereign dominion over them, and their own entire dependence on Him, and thus prove themselves to be the chosen people and servants of the true and living God. He commanded them at the same time to refrain from all corporal labor and servile works, and not to employ their domestics or servants on that day ; no, not even their beasts of burden, lest the use of them might be a hindrance to the due observance of the Sabbath, and that they might learn from thence to treat their servants, not with cruelty or hard-heartedness, but with charity and humanity, since they were commanded to spare the very beasts themselves, by letting them rest from hard labor one day in the week ; they were not even allowed to kindle fire in their houses, or to dress their meat on the Sabbath day ; this was to be done on the preceding day. The Scripture tells us, also, that whilst they were traveling through the desert they were obliged to gather as much of the heavenly manna for their food on every sixth day as was sufficient to support them on that day, and on the Sabbath, or seventh day, that ensued. And what is very remarkable, the double quantity of manna that was thus gathered on the sixth day, never corrupted, as it always did whenever they gathered more than one day's provision on any other day of the week, the Lord encouraging His people by this miracle to rely on His providence, and not to be too solicitous about the time to come. To enforce a faithful compliance with this holy ordinance the more effectually, He promised all kinds of temporal blessings to such as religiously observed the Sabbath day, and He denounced the most dreadful punishments against all transgressors. The book of Numbers, xv., informs us, that He expressly ordered a man to be stoned to death by the people for having gathered a few sticks on that day, which struck such a terror into the children

of Israel, that they and their posterity ever after became most rigid observers, not only of the weekly Sabbath, but likewise of the several other great festivals, which God Himself ordered them to observe in the course of the year, in memory of and in thanksgiving for the great temporal blessings which Heaven had conferred on them. It was in the Apostolic age that the Sabbath was translated from Saturday, the seventh day, to Sunday, the first day of the week. The Scriptures make no particular mention of this translation, though it took place all over Christendom since the infancy of the Church, which shows the necessity of admitting Apostolical traditions. However, this translation of the Sabbath from one day to another made no substantial alteration in the Third Commandment, inasmuch as it contains God's eternal law, and the moral and natural duty of man; for in this respect the commandment continues still unchangeable and indispensable, though it was liable to be changed as to whatever was only ceremonial, or inasmuch as it prescribed the seventh day of the week in particular to be kept holy. The best authority we have for the weekly Sabbath being thus translated, and for Sunday being substituted in the New Law in the place of Saturday, the ancient Jewish Sabbath, is the testimony and ordinance of the Holy Catholic Church, which, being ever guided by the Holy Ghost, wisely appointed the first day of the week to be the Christian Sabbath, and properly called it in the Scripture language, *the Lord's day* (Apoc. i), Our Lord having chosen it in preference to any other day for communicating His most gracious favors and blessings to mankind, and for displaying the most excellent works of His wisdom and power, according to the remark of the ancient Fathers. It was on a Sunday that our Lord Jesus completed the great work of our redemption, by rising from the dead on a Sunday, by sending down the Holy Ghost on a Sunday, and by forming and establishing His Church on a Sunday; and since the work of our redemption is a greater work than that of our creation, the day on which this great work had been fully accomplished, was justly deemed the most proper day in the week to be nominated and sanctified as the Lord's day, and fitter to be the Christian Sabbath and the day of public worship in the New Law of the Gospel than the day on which God had rested from the work of the creation. Hence it follows that we are equally obliged to keep the Christian Sabbath on Sunday, as the Jews were to keep holy the Jewish Sabbath on Saturday, the divine commandment being in this respect substantially the same, and remaining still in all its force; but in what

manner we are to comply with this obligation ! It is what I promised to show you in the second point.

As the day for keeping holy the Sabbath is different in the New Law from the day appointed in the Old Law, so the manner of sanctifying the Sabbath in the Law of the Gospel is also different from the manner prescribed by the Mosaic Law. Christians are not to carry the observance of their Sabbath to a ridiculous degree of superstition, like the Scribes and Pharisees, who censured our Blessed Saviour for healing the sick and performing other works of mercy and charity on the Sabbath. Neither are we to be misguided by an erroneous conscience, like the Jews mentioned in the first book of Machabees, ii., who imagined that they would be guilty of a violation of the Sabbath, if in a just war they took up arms on that day in defence of their own lives ; or if they even labored to extinguish a raging fire that surrounded them on every side and threatened them with immediate destruction ; for since *the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath*, as our Blessed Saviour says (Mark, ii. 27), it plainly follows that such things as are really and absolutely necessary for the preservation of our own life, or the life of our neighbor, are not forbidden on the Sabbath-day, but the unborn law of real necessity and charity to our neighbor may dispense in many things, which otherwise should not be done on the Sabbath ; for charity is the end of the law, and therefore no law can hinder works of real charity. Nay, the law of charity and mercy must go before all outward sacrifice and service, according to these words of Christ Himself in xii. 7, of St. Matthew : *I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.*

The precept of sanctifying the Christian Sabbath, or Lord's day, is perfectly clear and explicit on this point. It contains two parts, or is partly an affirmative precept and partly a negative precept ; that is to say, it commands something and it forbids something ; it commands us to spend the better part of the day in religious duties, or to employ such a portion of the Sabbath in spiritual exercises of piety and devotion that we may be truly said to *keep it holy*. Hence, besides the various exercises of piety which are commanded in general and left to our own private devotion, that every one may choose such as are fittest and properest for himself, we are ordered in particular, by the highest spiritual authority on earth to assist with devotion and attention at the public worship and great sacrifice of the Church, this being the most solemn act of religious worship, and one of the most essential duties of a Chris-

tian. However, it is not to be supposed that the Church, in thus commanding her children to assist devoutly at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass on the Lord's day, means that this is sufficient, since the Church by her precept neither did nor could ever intend the least derogation from the divine precept of *sanctifying the whole day*; on the contrary, she ceases not to inculcate the indispensable obligation of perfectly complying with the divine precept in its full extent, by constantly admonishing the faithful to have recourse on the Lord's day to the holy sacraments and fountains of grace with the necessary dispositions, to meditate devoutly on the sacred mysteries of their redemption, to thank, praise, and glorify the Lord for all His benefits, to read pious books, and assemble their children and domestics together in common prayer, to be more liberal than usual in their alms to the poor, and more diligent in performing deeds of charity and works of mercy, both spiritual and corporal. In short, the Church directs us not only to assist with devotion on the Lord's day at the divine service in the forenoon, but likewise to be present at exhortations, catechistical instructions, vespers, sermon, and benediction in the afternoon, whenever we can, without great inconvenience. As to the negative part of the precept of sanctifying the Lord's day, it forbids all unnecessary servile works; that is to say, all laborious, corporal, and mechanical employments, such as are followed by tradesmen and workmen for payment or hire. In a word, it forbids everything that is incompatible with the sanctification of the Sabbath, or that may be a hindrance to a religious observance of it, to the end that our hearts and minds, being free from worldly incumbrances and from the distracting cares of life, may be elevated to the contemplation of heavenly objects, and that we may have no business to take us from attending to the service of God and to the spiritual concerns of our souls. It is for this end that all servile works and worldly occupations are prohibited on the Lord's day and not to make idlers of mankind, as if such works were intrinsically evil in their own nature. No, my brethren, the time that would be employed at them on any of the other six days of the week should on this day be spent in such exercises of piety as render a day truly holy, and the corporal rest which we are commanded to observe should be sanctified and consecrated to God; for if the rest prescribed on the Lord's day was to be a mere corporal rest, or a bare cessation from manual labor, it would rather be a disadvantage than an advantage, as it would serve to discourage industry, and to countenance sloth and indolence. This

rest must, therefore, be sanctified in such a manner, that whilst our bodies rest from laborious occupations, our souls may rest in the Lord, which is the true Christian Sabbath, and, as St. Augustine says (Ep. 55), a figure of the spiritual rest and enjoyment of God on the great and happy Sabbath of eternity, which we expect hereafter, and which the Apostle (Heb. iv. 9,) calls the *sabbathizing of the people of God*.

I leave yourselves now to judge how much those Christians are mistaken who imagine themselves to be religious observers of the Lord's day, if, after sleeping till ten or eleven o'clock in the morning, they spend about half an hour in hearing the last Mass, and refrain from servile works the remainder of the day, but trifle it away in sloth and indolence, in idle conversation, in vain amusements, diversions, pastimes, and parties of pleasure in reading novels, romances, play-books, and stories of gallantry ; in reveling, dancing, card-playing, or the like profane occupations, which are by no means suitable to the sanctity of the Christian Sabbath. Such people may, perhaps, be deemed to comply with the ecclesiastical precept of hearing Mass, provided they assist at it with devotion and attention from the beginning to the end ; but it is hard to conceive how they can be truly said to comply with the divine precept : *Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day*, when they keep no more of it holy than the short time that they are assisting at Mass. Surely the *Sabbath day* is not sanctified by idleness or dissipation ; nor can it be supposed *to be kept holy*, as the Lord expressly commands, if only an hour or half an hour of it be kept holy, since an hour or half an hour is *not the day*, but only the twenty-fourth, or the eight-and-fortieth part of the day. If Christians of this description be highly reprehensible and remiss in their duty, how much more culpable must they be who are so far from sanctifying even this small part of the Lord's day, that they do not allow themselves time to be present at the august sacrifice of the altar, but spend the whole day in such a manner that they seem to celebrate a festival of Bacchus, and of Satan himself, rather than the Sabbath of the living God ! Christians, let me appeal to your own consciences, not with a view of confounding, but of admonishing you as my dearest brethren in Christ, as the Apostle speaks, how frequently is this day entirely devoted to pride and vanity, to luxury and debauchery, to sporting and gambling, to drunkenness and rioting, to intrigues and unlawful combinations ! What shocking scenes of impiety present themselves to our view on every side ! What volleys of horrid blasphemies and imprecations do we hear resounding from

every quarter ! What numbers of drunken men and women do we not meet on the flags, sleeping away the fumes of intoxicating liquors, or reeling along from one side to the other in a condition that disgraces the human species, and degrades it even beneath the brute creation ! Are not the dram-shops and public-houses crowded more on this day than on any other day in the week ? Are not the adjacent streets and public highways often stopped with a multitude of spectators, who seem to exult in encouraging their fellow-creatures to strip themselves naked, without the least regard to Christian modesty, and thus to decide their quarrels and disputes, by fighting like wild beasts, and tumbling each other into the channel like dogs ? What groups of unfortunate females and young libertines are seen infesting the common passages, and, like so many emissaries of hell, seeking to entrap and ruin the souls that the Redeemer of the World came to save by the effusion of His precious blood ! Yes, my brethren, it is thus that the only day which the Lord has specially reserved for His own service is shamefully devoted to the service of the devil, by several who go under the name of Christians, but to the great dishonor and scandal of religion live worse than Turks. O what a subject of sorrow and affliction must it be to those who have any zeal for the honor of God and the salvation of souls, to behold impiety erecting its head with such barefaced effrontery, and irreligion spreading its baneful influence with such licentiousness !

Is it not enough to call forth the woes, the tears and lamentations of a Jeremiah, to see the *Sabbath of the Lord God of Hosts thus abused, mocked, and derided* ? The very day, alas ! that has been instituted for worshiping our Creator, for purifying our souls, and for expiating the sins which are committed on the other six days of the week, is the very day on which the Lord is most grievously offended ; so that what St. John Chrysostom formerly said of some wicked libertines at Constantinople is applicable to several unhappy Christians of this depraved age : There is more wickedness committed by them on the Lord's day, says this holy doctor, than on any other day, nay, perhaps, more than the whole remainder of the week, although nothing is so strictly forbidden on this day as sin, sin being the most servile of all works, as it renders the sinner a slave of the devil. This made St. Augustine say that it would be better to spend the Lord's day in digging, ploughing, spinning, and carding wool, than in committing sinful and immodest tricks at hops and dances. Nay, it is the received opinion of several eminent divines, that sins committed on the Lord's day are more grievous than if they were committed

on any other day, especially if they be external and of a scandalous nature, because the circumstance of this sacred day aggravates the malice of such crimes as are committed thereon, as the circumstances of a holy place aggravates the malice of the crimes which are perpetrated therein.

Let me, therefore, my brethren, once more sound the divine commandment in your ears, and impress it deeply on your minds : *Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day.* Let me entreat you to beware perverting this day of mercy and grace into a day of wrath and perdition. Let me beseech you to refrain from the servile works of sin, and to practice the virtues of a Christian life every day, but more particularly on this day of purification, which belongs to God, that after the toils and labors of this mortal life you may possess the joys and glory of Heaven, and repose in the Lord for ever and ever ! O merciful Jesus, give us grace to be faithful in discharging all the obligations of this holy day, and wise in reaping all the advantages which Thou hast designed on it for the good of our souls. O may we make it our constant study to advance on this day in our way to Heaven, and since it is an emblem of everlasting rest, may we labor on it to withdraw our hearts from the perishable things of this world, and to be united here to Thee by fervent acts of adoration, love, praise, and thanksgiving, to the end we may be eternally united to Thee hereafter in the kingdom of Thy glory. Which is the happiness I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFT. PENTECOST.

ON THE LOVE OF OUR NEIGHBOR.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. The doctrine of love of our neighbor.
- II. The motives for this love.
- III. Jesus Christ the model of this love.
- IV. Grand denunciation of all uncharitableness.

Diliges proximum tuum sicut te ipsum.—*St. Matt c. xxii. v. 39.*

Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.—*St. Matt. c. xxii. v. 39.*

Of all Christian virtues there is not any one which our Blessed Redeemer has oftener or more warmly recommended than charity, of which the love of our neighbor is a branch. It is remarkable, that when the

young man mentioned in the Gospel asked Him what he should do in order to obtain eternal happiness, the Son of God proposed to him no other precepts but those which concern the virtue of charity. *Are you willing, said He, to enter into life everlasting? Observe the commandments, thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, &c.* In short, *thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.* Yes, my brethren, this is the whole scope of a Christian's duty; all other precepts are included in this, and by discharging this one obligation we fulfill the whole Law. Hence, as St. Jerome informs us, when St. John the Evangelist, through the infirmity of old age, was no longer able to entertain his audience with a long discourse, he contented himself with this brief exhortation: *My brethren, love each other.* The faithful being at length tired of constantly hearing the same admonition repeated, took the liberty to ask, *Why this frequent repetition?* Whereupon he made an answer worthy of the beloved Disciple of Jesus Christ: *Because, said he, it is the command of the Lord, and the observance of it alone suffices for life everlasting.* O divine reason, capable to make an impression on the heart of the most obdurate! Since, therefore, it is the command of God that we love each other, since our Blessed Redeemer has so strongly recommended it to us, and made this love the characteristic of His true disciples, it is of the utmost importance to make you thoroughly sensible of this great duty, which is the foundation that all the commandments of the second table of the decalogue depend on, and to propose to you the model, according to which you are to exert yourselves in the practice of it. Wherefore the motives that are to induce us to love our neighbor, and the model of this love, shall be the two parts of the following discourse. The motives which are to engage us to love our neighbor shall be the first point; the model of this love shall be the second point, and the whole subject of your favorable attention. Let us previously implore the intercession of the Immaculate Mother of Jesus, greeting her with the words of the angel. *Ave Maria.*

St. Augustine remarks in his twelfth Book of the City of God, that the Almighty created a prodigious number of fishes in the sea, birds in the air, and beasts in the field, as a stock from whence all the rest should proceed unto the end of time; but He was willing that all mankind should descend from one common father, to engage us thereby to love one another, to teach all men to regard each other as brethren in the order of nature. Though we should therefore resist all the tender sen-

timents that religion suggests, if we but hearken to the voice of nature, it cries out to us incessantly, that we ought to love our fellow-creatures, to whom we are allied by the ties of blood, and with whom we have an intimate connection, and live united together in society. The very heathens themselves entertain a reciprocal love and mutual friendship for each other, and are taught by the light of nature, that they ought to do by their neighbor as they would wish to be done by. This is a duty that reason dictates, instinct inspires, and that the Author of Nature has implanted in the centre of our hearts for the best of purposes. However, if we consider the order of grace, we shall find that there is a wide difference between the love that subsists among the heathens and the love that should reign among the faithful. The different kinds of human love and affection are generally influenced by flesh and blood, and spring from selfish views and principles purely natural ; but the love of charity which the Gospel commands has more noble and more elevated motives, and is the product of faith and grace. It is supernatural in its motives, and universal in its object ; it is an extension of the same divine virtue by which we love the Lord our God. By it we are to love our neighbor on God's account, and for God's sake, because he is made after the image and likeness of God, and redeemed with the precious blood of His Beloved Son. He is a child of God by creation, and His adopted Son by grace ; for which reason we are ordered in the Lord's Prayer to address God as *Our Father*. All the works of His hands are the objects of His love ; but He has a particular tenderness and affection for man, who is the master-piece of infinite art, and who excels amongst all sublunary beings. It was for his use alone that this vast and stately fabric of the universe has been erected, and for his service all other creatures have been destined. Nay, the very angels themselves, who are the brightest beings of the creation, have been appointed to be the guardians of man, to conduct him with security through the paths which lead to life everlasting. Are not these cogent arguments and most pressing motives to oblige us to love our neighbor ? He who is worthy of the love of a God, is he undeserving of our esteem ? You will tell me, perhaps, your neighbor has treated you ill, he has blasted your character, he has stained your reputation by calumny and detraction, he has supplanted you in trade, he has made you appear odious in the eyes of the world, as far as malice could represent you in the blackest colors. But, if you listen to St. Paul, he will tell you that this injurious treatment must not cancel the debt of charity, or cause a breach of that love

you owe your neighbor. Hear this reason : God says He recommends to us the love of our brethren, because when we were His declared enemy by sin, when we had forfeited all claim, all pretensions to heaven, Christ became for us a victim of reconciliation. He died an ignominious death to redeem us from hell, and to reinstate us in the favor of the Almighty. He ransomed us, not with corruptible gold and silver, but at a dearer rate, with His own most sacred blood. We should, therefore, love even our greatest enemies, in consideration of this love and affection which the Almighty has testified to us. This is what St. John likewise inculcates in the first of his epistles, where, after expatiating on the infinite love of God toward mankind, in giving for them His only Son as the price of our redemption, he infers from this prodigy of charity the obligation we are under *to love one another*—1 Epis. iv. 11. Consider then, my brethren, that man who has offended you as ennobled, ransomed, and all covered with the blood of Jesus Christ, and he will not appear vile or despicable in your eyes. This consideration will lead you to reason thus with yourselves. This person, whom I hate and despise, is still the object of the tenderness and affection of my Saviour. It was for him, it was for me, that this loving Redeemer spilt his precious blood. This should be an indissoluble tie of mutual love and friendship between him and me. I will, therefore, no longer bear an enmity to my neighbor, but love every one who is the friend of my Saviour and of my God, since a common friend unites those whom the most violent enmity had separated. Thus it is that the spirit of charity should influence our conduct ; thus it is that we are to show ourselves the true disciples of Jesus Christ ; for it is by this test alone that all men shall know us to be His disciples, as He Himself declares in St. John, c. xiii. v. 35.

What can be more reasonable than that this charity should constantly reign amongst all Christians ! By the grace of baptism and regeneration we are all become children of the same Heavenly Father, members of the same mystical body, supported by the same hand of Providence, and destined for the same end, the same eternal happiness. Our Blessed Saviour has broken down the wall of separation that stood between us : He has united us in the same worship, the same faith, the same sacraments, the same doctrine, the same discipline ; He has formed one flock, one Church, one sheepfold out of all the tribes, all the nations of the earth. Are not these so many inducements to bind us closely together with the strictest ties of charity ? How shameful then would it be, to

behold Christians unhappily divided amongst themselves ! Must they not be stripped of all these tender sentiments, which both nature and religion inspire, if they suffer such a division to take place ? In vain do we flatter ourselves that we love God, when a spirit of discord and disunion, envy, malice, and hatred prevails between us and our neighbor. *Whoever declares he loves God*, says St. John (1 Epis. ii.) *and hateth his brother, is a liar* ; though his life should otherwise seem devout, pure, and angelical, he deceives you, he deceives himself ; his piety is no better than hypocrisy and illusion, if he be void of charity and fraternal love for his neighbor. In short, he is no better than *a sounding brass, a tinkling cymbal*, and a mere empty *nothing* in the sight of God, if he fails to have charity. The distinguishing character of this divine virtue is given by St. Paul, writing to the Corinthians (1 Ep. xiii.) : *Charity*, says he, *is patient, is kind, it envieth not* either the temporal or spiritual welfare of a neighbor. *It does no prejudice to any person*, either by its actions or by its discourse. *It is not puffed up, it is not ambitious*, nor does it pretend to domineer over the most despicable. *It is so disinterested* that it will sooner give up its right than enter into disputes which might disturb Christian peace. If you give the offense, it fancies it has given the occasion ; if you treat it with contempt, it thinks you do it but justice. All the faults that can be excused, it represents them in the most favorable light ; it is afflicted when they are too visible, and is overjoyed when it finds anything praiseworthy. It does not rashly judge, censure, or condemn another, nor endeavor by malicious comments to misconstrue his actions, and turn his virtues into vices. *It thinks not evil*, but *believes* all that savors of piety to be true and genuine. *It suffers* without murmur, without complaint. *It bears* with the most imperfect, and finds even in their failings something that makes them worthy of its indulgence. God Himself is its motive. Neither the indignity nor the ingratitude of men can stop the course of its liberality ; but, in imitation of the great Creator, who causes His sun to shine on the unjust as well as on the just, it dispenses its favors with a liberal hand to the deserving and to the unworthy. The sick and the suffering poor, in cellars and garrets, who are the most lively instances of human misery, and whose ulcerous bodies, under tattered garments, excite horror in the spectators, are the favorite objects of charity's tenderness and compassion. It still discovers, with the eyes of faith, something in them worthy of respect and veneration. The blood of their Saviour, which is the price of their

redemption, is an embellishment that makes them agreeable in its sight, and the more nature abhors to approach such disagreeable objects, the more charity is pleased to comfort and assist them. It is the character of human love to seek its own private interest; it shows itself in empty compliments, in protestations of friendship, in offers of service, in deceiving promises, and in all those other disguises which policy has invented to ensnare men by a fair outside. But Christian charity is not counterfeit; its words do not belie its actions, and its actions are always conformable to its sentiments, because sincerity is essential to it, as the Apostle observes (1 Tim. i. 5): *Charity from a pure heart, and a good conscience, and an unfeigned faith.* It never acts by the low and earthly views of interest and vanity, which generally influence the actions of men, but studies to do what is pleasing to God. If it does good, it takes care that it may not be seen; if it gives alms, it hides them in the bosom of the poor; it draws a veil over the gift, that the benefactor may not be discovered. The pleasure it feels in doing a good action is to it a far greater recompense than all the grand applauses of men. As all it does is for God's honor and glory, so it desires no other witness but Him. It is enough that He should know the good works it does, to reward them hereafter with everlasting happiness. Hence the truly charitable Christian is that universal man, who, like St. Paul, transforms himself into all shapes to be of service to all. His ordinary employment is to succor, to defend, and to serve his brethren; he overlooks their imperfections, and adapts himself to their different humors. His is the comfort of the afflicted, the support of the feeble, the succor of the necessitous, the asylum of the persecuted, and the counsel of the ignorant. There is no weakness which he does not commiserate, no misery which does not excite his tenderness and compassion. Such are the characteristics of the amiable virtue of charity. You have heard the motives which are to induce you to it. The model of your love for your neighbor shall be the subject of the second point.

To love as we would willingly be loved, to love as we love ourselves, to love as Jesus Christ has loved us—these rules are to be the model of that charity which we owe our neighbor. We are willing to be loved by all men; we love ourselves sincerely; the Son of God has loved us solidly. Our charity, then, to be perfect, must have these three qualities: It must be universal, sincere, and solid. First, it must be universal, that is, it must take in all mankind. Our Blessed Saviour gives us to understand, in the parable of the charitable Samaritan, that

all men, without exception or reserve, are our neighbors, whether friend or enemy, countryman or foreigner, rich or poor. The Almighty has given us in Himself an example of this extensive and universal charity. His paternal providence procures the welfare of all created beings, and supplies the necessities of the most minute, the most abject creatures. He waters the land of the reprobate with as gentle showers as that of the faithful Christian who is attached to His service. The universe subsists by His infinite power, and He showers down the gifts of nature on the unjust as well as on the just—Matt. v. It is thus Christian charity tenders its good offices to all, without exception, because it finds all inclosed in the heart of Jesus Christ. It embraces the whole universe, has as many relations, as many friends, as there are men on the face of the earth ; and, as St. John Chrysostom speaks, exceeds in its affection to all that of the most tender parent to his children. All men in general, notwithstanding the difference of their religion, or the contrariety of their humors, are the objects of its tenderness and compassion. It excludes not the most imperfect nor the most vicious from a share in its affection, but commiserates their weakness and infirmity. Far from entertaining a bitter, indiscreet zeal against them or traducing their character, whilst it separates from them by way of precaution, it assists them with prayers, with good example, and interests itself in their favor at the Throne of Mercy. Charity is also sincere, like unto that love which we bear to ourselves, and which of all love is the most sincere, the most constant, the most durable, the most active, and the most extensive. Hence the *love of ourselves* is the model by which we are commanded to regulate the love we owe our neighbor. When I speak of *the love of ourselves* on this occasion, I do not mean that blind, inordinate, and criminal self-love which is governed by passion, grounded on the inclinations of corrupt nature, and which moves us to gratify our sensuality, curiosity, and pride, and to consult only our own ease, pleasure, and interest in all things ; but I mean that true and just love of ourselves which is directed by reason and religion.

The Scripture also gives us to understand that we are to imitate that love and union which subsists between the members of the same body ; for we are all one body and fellow-members in Christ, as the Apostle speaks—Rom. xii. 5. We have all different offices, functions, and uses in this body, and have all mutually need of one another. Providence has wisely assigned us various employments and duties, which are necessary for the benefit of the whole body. Some are placed in a higher

and in a more exalted rank ; others in a lower and in a more humble station ; some are at the head, some at the feet, and all should rest satisfied with the station allotted to them without murmuring, or envying their fellow-members any advantage they may possess above them. There is no envy, no disagreement between the members of the same natural body, says St. Augustine. The feet do not envy the head, the eyes, or the hands ; they do not despise or quarrel with each other, but are all solicitous for one another, and combine to give a mutual assistance ; they all love each other, are in pain for one another, and are mutually careful one of the other—1 Cor. xii. 24, 26. One member protects and defends another in danger. If the head be threatened, the eye discovers the danger ; the hand is raised to prevent the blow, and the feet run away to escape it. If the foot happens to tread upon a thorn, the back stoops, the eye searches for it, the tongue complains and asks where it is, the hands are employed, and the fingers pull it out and deliver the suffering member from its torment. When one member is hurt, all the rest are concerned and ready to bring relief ; and when it is cured and well, all the rest rejoice and are happy. Such is the love, such is the union, says St. Augustine, that ought to subsist amongst Christians, who are members of Christ's mystical body.

Our Blessed Saviour proposes another model of charity more sublime and more perfect. *A new commandment*, says he (John xiii. 34). *I give unto you, that you love one another, as I have loved you.* By these words he undoubtedly demands of us a love of our neighbor, which has in view nothing less than the eternal salvation of his soul. Should I then assert, that to procure the eternal salvation of your husbands, of your wives, of your children, and of your neighbors, you sacrifice even life itself, were it necessary, I would tell you nothing but what St. John positively declares to be your duty. *We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren*—1 Ep. iii. 16. But how could I think of preaching this doctrine at present to those who, perhaps, several times in the day pray to God to damn the souls of their wives, children, and domestics ! How could I think of preaching it to those unhappy parents, whose houses resemble so many schools of the devil, and who are so far from instructing their children in the principles of religion, that they bring them up as so many victims which they sacrifice to hell ! What success could I promise myself by recommending it to those unfortunate sinners of our days, who seem to have nothing more at heart than the ruin and damnation of each other, as they daily endeavor to corrupt

and debauch so many innocent souls by their filthy discourses, wicked intrigues, and scandalous example! Notwithstanding, the principal duty of charity is to assist each other mutually in the grand affair of salvation; for if it obliges us to succor our brethren in their temporal wants, it imposes a far more strict obligation to assist them in their spiritual necessities, by giving them a brotherly admonition when we see them in danger of losing their souls, and by endeavoring to withdraw them from the road to perdition, and persuade them by good advice and example to the practice of virtue. O God of Charity, inspire us with these Christian sentiments. Fill our hearts and inflame our souls, we beseech Thee, with this celestial fire which Thou didst come to kindle on earth, and grant us the great gift of final perseverance, that we may at our dying hour, through Thy mercy, inherit those sacred mansions of bliss, where charity is to be the joy and constant occupation of Thy angels and saints for a never-ending eternity. This is the blessing which I wish you all, my brethren, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON THE NATURE OF INDULGENCES AND JUBILEES.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. Who has the power of forgiving sin?
- II. The nature and utility of indulgences and jubilees.
- III. The conditions necessary to gain them.

Confide, fili, remittuntur tibi peccata.—*St. Matt. c. ix. v. 2.*

Be of good heart, son; thy sins are forgiven thee.—*St. Matt. c. ix. v. 2.*

WE do not find the power of remitting sin was ever conferred on any human creature before the Son of God became man. This signal blessing was reserved for the children of God, under the New Law of Grace. Christ our Lord, as man, being at the same time true God, was the first who received this power from His Heavenly Father, and the Scripture informs us, that He exercised it on several occasions. We read in the Gospel of this day that He wrought an illustrious miracle, to convince the incredulous Jews *that he had power on earth to forgive sins.* The

Scribes and Pharisees, a set of carping hypocrites, who made it their constant practice to censure His doctrine, to misconstrue His words, and to traduce His most innocent actions, were scandalized, and charged Him in their own hearts with blasphemy, on hearing Him say to a man who had been brought to Him, *lying on a bed, and ill of the palsy, Son, be of good heart, thy sins are forgiven thee.* Wherefore, our Divine Redeemer, knowing their thoughts, and willing to confirm His words and doctrine, replied with His usual meekness and charity: *Which is it easier to say, thy sins are forgiven thee, or to say rise up and walk? But that you may know the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins, I say to thee,* addressing Himself then to the sick man, *Rise, take up thy bed, and go into thy house,* which the sick man accordingly did in an instant, to the great astonishment of the crowd of the people who were eye-witnesses hereof, and who began immediately to *glorify God, for having given such power to men.*

It is true, God alone has power of *Himself* to forgive sins; but Christ, who is both God and man, could and did communicate this power of remitting sins *in His name, and by His authority,* to His Apostles and their lawful successors, as *His ministers and instruments.* (See Sermon on Low Sunday, p. 203.) It is in virtue of this power and commission that the pastors of the Church have been accustomed ever since the earliest years of Christianity, to exercise a spiritual and judiciary authority in the sacred tribunal of penance, and not only to absolve the faithful from the guilt of their sins, upon a sincere repentance, but likewise to grant them indulgences occasionally, when a just cause required it, for the purpose of releasing them from the debt of temporal punishment, which generally remains to be discharged, either in this life or in the next, even after the sins themselves are forgiven; both as to the guilt and the eternal punishment due to them in hell. This practice, and the doctrine of absolution, when dispassionately considered, fairly represented, and rightly understood, far from being any way derogatory or injurious to the honor of God, will be found to redound very much to it, and to be a great curb to sin. Instead of promoting sin, or being an encouragement to a sinner to persevere in iniquity, upon the confidence of being absolved whenever he pleases, nothing contributes more to the real conversion of sinners, as nothing lays corrupt nature under so many severe restraints, nothing subjects it to more humiliating or more penal conditions, nothing encourages the practice of works of piety and religion, charity, and penance more

effectually. To imagine, then, that by an absolution, or by an indulgence, is meant a leave or license to commit sin, or at least a pardon previously granted for future sins, is a notion that justly deserves the abhorrence of every Christian, and that is diametrically opposed to the belief of the Catholic Church, which teaches us that no authority upon earth can give previous leave to commit the least venial sin, or can absolve any sinner whatsoever without a true repentance, and a firm purpose of amendment. To elucidate this matter, and to excite you to a due esteem for indulgences, is the design of the following discourse. In the first point I will lay before you the nature and utility of indulgences and jubilees, and in the second, the conditions that are necessary to gain the benefit of them. Let us, before we proceed, devoutly implore the assistance of the Divine Spirit, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, greeting her in the words of the Archangel Gabriel. *Ave Maria.*

Were I to speak here to a people of a different religious persuasion, who reject the authority of the Church, and deny it a power of granting indulgences, I would not despair of being able to prove this orthodox truth out of the written word of God, which is the only authority they pretend to abide by ; but glory be to God, no one here doubts of the power imparted by Christ to His Church. No confusion of Babel, no wall of separation divides us in this sacred place ; we all sing the same hymn of the peaceful Sion, and we are all but *one sheepfold under one pastor*. We all believe that Jesus Christ faithfully fulfilled the promise which He made first to St. Peter, saying : *I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of Heaven. Whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven ; and whatsoever thou shall loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven*—Matt. xvi. 19. And again, to all His Apostles : *Amen, I say to you, whatsoever you shall bind upon earth, shall be bound also in heaven ; and whatsoever you shall loose upon earth, shall be loosed also in heaven*—Matt. xviii. 18. These promises, which our Lord made without any exception, limitation, or reservation whatever, clearly imply a power of loosing and releasing all such bonds as might otherwise hinder or retard the entrance of a soul into the kingdom of Heaven, *into which, as the Scripture assures us, nothing that is sullied or defiled will be admitted*—Apoc. xxi. Hence it is that the power of granting indulgences has been made use of in the Church at all times, and in all ages, since the purest and earliest years of Christianity, as the Council of Trent observes. St. Paul himself, at the re-

quest of the faithful of Corinth, granted an indulgence to the incestuous man whom he had excommunicated and put under penance (1 Cor. v.), for when he understood that this man had given evident proofs of his real contrition and sincere conversion, the Apostle treated him with the greatest indulgence, and not only freed him from the excommunication he had inflicted, but also from all guilt, and remitted to him, both before God and man, the remainder of the punishment which he was to have suffered. This *pardon* St. Paul granted *in the person of Christ*, that is, by the power and authority he had received from Christ, and as if Christ Himself, really present, had granted it, lest perhaps the Corinthian should be overwhelmed *with too much sorrow*, and fall into pusillanimity and despair—2 Cor. ii. 7, 10. Tertullian, who flourished in the second century, testifies (*lib. de pud. c. ult.*), that the bishops and pastors of the primitive Church were accustomed, in the days of persecution, to grant indulgences to repenting sinners, and to remit the penalties due to their crimes, when they produced letters of attestation from imprisoned and tortured martyrs, who sealed their faith with the effusion of their blood. St. Cyprian also informs us (*Ep. ix. 10, 13, and 24*), that the bishops frequently hastened the grace of absolution, and discharged penitents at the request of the holy martyrs, from the whole or from part of the penitential works enjoined them, particularly in case of sickness, or when their spiritual good required it, and too great a rigor was likely to prejudice their souls. We read likewise in chapter xii. of the first General Council of Nice, and in other particular Councils, that bishops were empowered to abridge the time and the degrees of the canonical humiliations and penances then in force, in favor of such penitents as performed them with greatest fervor. Whenever they were moved by the tears and repentance of sinners to do this, it was called an *indulgence* of so many years, as the penance enjoined by the canons for their different sins should otherwise have lasted, because it was the effect of an indulgence or compassion of the Church toward her children. For some sins of public notoriety, seven years public penance was enjoined; for others, eleven, fifteen, or more years, in proportion to the enormity of the crimes. During this time the penitents fasted four quarantines in the year, at least three days a week on bread and water; they stood at the church gate upon Sundays and Holy-days, clothed in a penitential habit, and were not admitted, unless for just and pressing reasons, to the sacraments, until their years of penance were finished. This was the ancient rigorous discipline of the Church

for many ages, and according to it some sinners must have been liable to a much greater number of years of penance, corresponding to their sins, than they could be expected to live, in order to fulfill it, so that any extraordinary grants of indulgences which might, perhaps, have been made in favor of such penitents, are to be understood as designed to release them from the extraordinary debt of temporal punishment they had incurred by their sins, according to the canons then in force. Indulgences, however, were not so frequent then, nor so necessary as they are at present, when a general depravity seems to have taken possession of the heart of man. The spirit of penance was then everywhere visible from the ardor alone of imitating Jesus Christ, the perfect model of all Christians; the faithful wishing to tread in the footsteps of their crucified Redeemer, devoted their lives to the love of the cross, the desire of martyrdom, and the most painful austerities and exercises of penance and mortification. They endeavored, in general, with the aid of divine grace, to satisfy for the offenses which the weakness of human nature had caused them sometimes to fall into, without having recourse to the spiritual treasures of the Church. When this primitive zeal became cold, and the spirit of penance relaxed, the Church judged it expedient to moderate the severity of her ancient discipline, in condescension to the weakness of her children, and to render the usage of indulgences more frequent in these latter ages. Her intention, however, is not to diminish the zeal of the faithful thereby, nor to exempt or exonerate them from doing penance for their sins; but, on the contrary, to animate them with the spirit of penance, and inspire them with a more ardent desire of atoning for their sins by their own voluntary satisfactions, and by devoutly performing the penitential works which are usually enjoined and prescribed as a condition necessary for the obtaining of an indulgence. Hence the Council of Trent teaches that the obligation of doing penance for sin is so indispensable a duty, that *the whole life of a Christian ought to be a continual practice of penance*. Sin is at present no less offensive to Almighty God than it formerly was, and consequently no less punishment is due to it now than in the primitive ages, since the divine justice is still unchangeably the same. Nay, the crimes of the generality of modern Christians are more grievous and more numerous than the crimes of the primitive Christians, and of course their penance and satisfaction should be proportionably greater, according to this rule laid down by God Himself: *The number of stripes shall be according to the greatness of the offense*—Deut. xxv. It is

true, when sinners truly repent, God in His great mercy is pleased to remit their sins, both as to the guilt and eternal punishment due in hell to every mortal sin; but His divine justice commonly substitutes a temporal punishment in the place of the eternal punishment, as appears evidently from several illustrious examples recorded in Holy Writ. Adam himself, though the Lord pardoned him his sin, was in punishment thereof turned out of the earthly Paradise, and condemned to labor during life, and his posterity became subject to sickness, to death, and to a long train of miseries and calamities, in consequence of his disobedience. We read also, in chapter xii. of the Book of Numbers, that the sister of Moses was subjected to seven days' penance, though her sin had been forgiven. In like manner, the Israelites were pardoned their sins, through the intercession of Moses, and yet, in punishment of their idolatry and murmurs, they were condemned to wander forty years in the desert, and debarred from entering the Land of Promise—Numb. xiv. The prayers of Manasses were heard, and his sins were forgiven, yet he was afterward temporally punished, and God would by no means remit the punishment. King David was assured by the Prophet Nathan, that the Lord *had put away his sin*; yet he was punished with the death of his child, the dishonor of his house, dissensions in his family, and several other judgments, which were inflicted on him—Samuel, ii. 12. A sin of pride, which he afterward committed, was pardoned, and yet it was punished with a plague of three days, which carried off seventy thousand of his subjects—2 Kings, xxiv. 15. Here we plainly see the pardon of sin separated from the pardon of the punishment, and the justice of God reserving a right to inflict a temporal punishment on those who have transgressed His sacred laws. In the sacrament of Baptism the case is different. We are then treated with unbounded mercy, and the merits of Christ are applied to our souls, and accepted in their full extent in satisfaction for our sins; for though we are not thereby freed from all the infirmities occasioned by original sin, the Almighty, being willing to permit them to remain in order to try our fidelity, to exercise our virtue, to disengage our affections from the world, and to humble our pride at the thoughts of our own weakness, yet by the grace of baptism we receive a full and perfect remission of all past sins committed before it, and we are delivered from all the punishment, both eternal and temporal, due to them; but we are not received again into favor upon such easy terms after baptism as before it, the sins committed after baptism implying a base ingratitude, special

malice, and barefaced contempt of the goodness and bounty of God. Justice and mercy going then together, God is moved, through the merits of Christ, to grant us mercy upon a sincere repentance, and to forgive us our sins, both as to the guilt and the eternal punishment due to them; but His justice is pleased to change a greater punishment into a less, and requires to be satisfied by penitential works and temporal chastisements for the abuse of His mercy. This is not only conformable to the rules of strict justice, but also attended with signal advantages to our souls, and highly conducive to our salvation; for it serves to give us a true sense of the grievousness of sins committed after baptism, and of the great injury thereby done to the infinite majesty of God; it keeps us in a salutary fear, makes us more cautious and careful, and deters us from future relapses; it checks our vicious inclinations, strikes at the root of our spiritual disorders, appeases the wrath and disarms the divine justice, and renders us more faithful in the performance of our religious duties, and more fervent in the practice of Christian virtues. If we were too easily reconciled after great crimes, and too speedily freed from the bonds of justice, we would be apt to think slightly of them, to abuse the facility of pardon, and to abandon ourselves to a temerarious confidence, according to the remark of St. Augustine: *Parva putaretur culpa, si cum illa fineretur et pœna.*

It is to expiate and satisfy for this debt of temporal punishment, due to the divine justice on account of past forgiven sins, that we are subjected to some painful and laborious works of penance in the sacred tribunal, and that indulgences are granted to the faithful. The direct and immediate effect of an indulgence, therefore, is not to pardon or remit sin, for it supposes sin already forgiven, both as to guilt and the eternal punishment, either by the sacrament of penance, or by a perfect contrition, which includes a desire of the sacrament. By an indulgence is only meant a relaxation or remission of the debt of temporal punishment which remains to be discharged and atoned for, either in this world or in purgatory, *until the last farthing is paid*; as the Gospel expresses it (Matt. xxv.), the sinner's repentance being seldom so perfect as to release him entirely from it. Some indulgences are *partial*, some *plenary*, some are confined to particular churches or places, and granted on solemn festivals and days of devotion; herein they differ from *jubilees*, which are more rare, more solemn, more general, accompanied with greater privileges, and extended to the universal

Church. They all derive their virtue and value from the price of the blood of Jesus Christ, as rivulets derive from their fountain head, and as the moon borrows its light from the sun ; in Him we have a most plentiful redemption, and an inexhaustible treasure to make up for all our deficiencies, to supply all our wants, and to relieve all our necessities. His merits and satisfactions are of infinite value, and the source of all our good ; they elevate our penitential works to the value they have, our works being no otherwise valuable and satisfactory than as joined to

- His satisfactions ; for it is through Him alone we can expect to find a grateful acceptance in the sight of God. What we call *satisfaction* with the primitive Church, is nothing but the application of His satisfactions ; nothing is wanting to them on His part, but something is wanting on our part, in order to have the fruits and merits of His passion and death applied and communicated to our souls ; for He did not intend to patronize indolence, encourage sloth, or discharge us from the obligation of satisfying His offended justice as far as we are able. On the contrary, He requires us to join the small mite of our poor endeavors with His superabundant satisfactions, that we may partake of the benefit of them. This made St. Paul say (Coloss. i. 24), that *he accomplished and fulfilled in himself what was behind-hand and wanting to the passion of Christ*, that is, to the application of His infinite merits. As to the satisfactions and merits of the saints, since they have their value from Him, and through Him are accepted by His Eternal Father, they were also applicable to the faithful upon earth ; for by the *communion* which the members of His mystical body have one with another, they reciprocally receive help from each other, and are enabled to say with the Royal Prophet (Ps. cxviii.) : *I partake, O my God, of all the good works of those who fear thee*. The Scripture informs us that God spared Loth on account of the faith of Abraham ; He also spared the Israelites on account of Moses, and was willing to spare the Sodomites, if ten just men had been found amongst them. But what are the conditions required to gain an indulgence ?

One of the most essential conditions required for gaining the benefit of a plenary indulgence is to be in the state of grace. It is in vain to expect that the punishment due to sin will be forgiven whilst the guilt or affection of it remains in the soul ; and the guilt of it will remain in the soul until it is remitted and washed away by the grace of Jesus Christ, who has merited for us the pardon of our sins, and repeatedly promised it to those who sincerely repent, and approach the throne of

mercy with proper dispositions. To gain the full effect of a plenary indulgence, and to be released from the whole punishment due upon account of past sins, we must not only be free from the guilt and affection of mortal sin, but also from the guilt and affection of venial sin. This should excite the faithful to redouble their fervor, and to dispose themselves in the best manner they are able for the sacraments of reconciliation, if they wish to obtain the benefit of a plenary indulgence. Indulgences, particularly plenary indulgences and jubilees, which are the most signal of all indulgences, are favors granted only to the just, and friends of God, who apply devoutly for them. They are merciful dispensations and releases, designed for the succor and relief of the indigent, to supply their wants out of the treasury of the Church by offering to God an equivalent for the debt of temporal punishment, that the infirmity of human nature and their own insufficiency render them liable to. Besides the various indulgences that may be gained on the principal solemnities and festivals which occur in the course of the year, the plenary indulgence, called the *Jubilee*, is granted every twenty-fifth year, and upon some other extraordinary occasions to all the faithful, who, being truly penitent, approach the holy sacrament worthily, and duly comply with the other conditions of fasting, alms-deeds, and devout prayers, which are then usually prescribed. The intention of the Church herein is to renew the spirit of fervor, piety, and charity among the faithful, to promote the practice of all kind of good works, to rouse the lukewarm, and bring back the strayed sheep from their evil ways. She then calls most pressing on all sinners, and most zealously invites them to return, like the prodigal son, to their Heavenly Father with their whole heart, that they may be reinstated in their deserted rights, and restored to their paternal inheritance which they unhappily forfeited. She solicits them to unite with the whole body of the faithful all over the world, in offering a holy violence to Heaven by the public prayers and penitential works which are generally performed on the occasion. This solemn indulgence is justly distinguished by the name of *Jubilee*, a word that signifies *joy and exultation*, because the effects of it are the conversions of multitudes of sinners, which gives joy to the angels in heaven; the multiplying of all sorts of good works, which gives edification to all Christendom; and the spiritual joy, inward peace, and consolation, which are sensibly felt in the souls of those who worthily partake of it. The year that this great act of grace is extended to all the faithful is called the *Holy and Jubilee year*, from the resemblance it

bears with the *Jubilee* year in the Old Law, the origin and institution of which we read—Levit. xxv. and xxvii. It was a year of remission and indulgence for the people of God. As soon as it was announced with trumpets by the priests to the children of Israel, all bondsmen and slaves were set at liberty, prisoners were released, debtors were discharged, and every one returned to his former possessions. It is of it that the Prophet Isaias speaks (c. lxi.), where he says, that *the Lord sent him to preach indulgence, to deliver captives, to discharge debtors, and to heal the wounds of the sick*. The ancient Jubilee was ordered to be celebrated every fiftieth year, and that whole year was sanctified in the same manner that the Jews sanctified their weekly Sabbath, by refraining from servile works; and to prevent the people from suffering any hardship on account of so long a Sabbath, Divine Providence took care to bless the labor of the preceding year in such a manner that they were supplied with plenty of all kinds of grain and all sorts of fruit, not only for the Jubilee year, but also for the two following years, on account of the sanctification of the Jubilee year. Such were the advantages and benefits of the Jubilee in the Old Law; but they were only figures and shadows of the benefits and advantages that are derived from the Jubilee in the New Law of grace. In the Old Law the people received only temporal blessings that regarded this transitory life; in the New Law we enjoy many spiritual blessings that relieve our souls and open the way to life everlasting. In the Jewish Jubilee, those who had been slaves to men were freed and set at liberty; in the Christian Jubilee, those who were before slaves of Satan by sin are released from their bondage and restored to the liberty of the children of God. In the ancient Jubilee, debtors were acquitted of all their worldly debts, and recovered their earthly possessions; in the Jubilee of the Evangelical Law, Christians are released from their spiritual debts, reinstated in the favor of God, and recover the right and title to the kingdom of Heaven, and to their past merits, which they had forfeited by falling into mortal sin. In virtue of the power of binding and loosing, and the keys left to the Church by Jesus Christ, they are freed from their chains, released from their captivity, absolved from the guilt of their sins, acquitted from the punishment they incurred thereby, and delivered from the bonds that might otherwise hinder or retard their souls from entering into the kingdom of Heaven. However, it is only for such sinners as are truly converted and reclaimed from their evil ways, that the Church thus opens her spiritual treasures, and unlocks the gates of

the kingdom of Heaven. She claims no power to impart the benefit of an absolution or of an indulgence to those who will not renounce the devil and his works, or who refuse to be-reconciled to their enemies, to repair the scandal they have given, to shun the dangerous occasions of sin, to make restitution of their neighbor's property which they unjustly possess, to repair the injuries they have done him, or to drop the detestable habits of cursing, swearing, and blaspheming, wherein they are involved. Any abuses that may, perhaps, be committed herein through the fault or connivance of individuals, cannot with justice be laid to the charge of the Catholic religion ; since the Church is so far from authorizing or countenancing them, that she utterly disclaims, censures, and condemns them, as appears clearly from the decree of the Council of Trent relative to indulgences, and from the common doctrine of the most learned divines, who assert that pardons and indulgences, granted without a just cause, or without the necessary dispositions on the part of those who apply for them, are not ratified by Almighty God, who according to the Royal Prophet (Psal. lxxxiv. 9), will only *speake peace unto his people, and unto his saints*, and grant it to such as recover His sanctifying grace, by *being converted to him with all their heart*. O Divine Jesus, grant us all the grace of a true conversion, that we may draw waters in joy from Thy sacred fountains, and be duly qualified to hear these words of peace and comfort pronounced in our favor, which Thou hast vouchsafed to say to the sick man, mentioned in this day's Gospel, *Son, be of good heart, thy sins are forgiven thee*. This is the blessing that I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen*.

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON THE SMALL NUMBER OF THE ELECT.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. The number of the elect.
- II. The path of innocence.
- III. The path of penance.
- IV. The terrible truthfulness and reality of Christ's utterances.

Multi sunt vocati, pauci vero electi.—*St. Matt. c. xxii. v. 14.*

Many are called, but few are chosen.—*St. Matt. c. xxii. v. 14.*

Who would imagine, my brethren, that a guest invited on the part of his sovereign to partake of a marriage feast would be sentenced on so solemn and so joyful an occasion to be tied hands and feet and plunged into a frightful dungeon, where there was nothing to be heard but weeping and gnashing of teeth! Such, notwithstanding, was the dismal fate of the guest spoken of in this day's Gospel. What was the cause of his condemnation! He is not accused of having ill-treated the other guests, or of having committed any insolence in the banquet-room. All the crime he is charged with is that he came to the marriage-feast without being clothed with the wedding garment. For this reason he was expelled by the waiters, and cast into exterior darkness. By this man are represented all sinners who are void of the grace of God, defiled with sin, and, whilst they continue in that unhappy state, exposed every moment to the manifest danger of being excluded from the banquet of eternal glory that is prepared for the elect in the kingdom of Heaven, and of being delivered over to the ministers of divine justice, in order to be precipitated into a gloomy prison, where there is nothing but tears, despair, horror, fatal blindness, devouring flames, and eternal damnation.

The Lord, it is true, does not desire the death of any sinner, but that he be converted and live, as the Prophet Ezechiel assures us (xxxiii. 11). *He is not willing that any should perish,* says St. Peter (2 Epis. iii. 9). Says St. Paul (Tim. 1, Ephes. iv.): *It is his will that all men be saved, and that they come to the knowledge of the truth* (v. iv.) He invites all mankind, without exception, to the inheritance of His heavenly kingdom, and supplies them with the means that are necessary and sufficient

to attain the happy end of their creation. Nevertheless, it is not to be doubted but the greater part of mankind is lost for ever, since Christ Himself declares in the conclusion of this day's Gospel, *that many are called, few are chosen*. This divine oracle is really terrifying, and enough not only to alarm sinners, but also to fill the just themselves with a salutary fear. Theologians and spiritual writers, however, endeavor to throw some light on it, by remarking that the number of the elect is to be supposed to exceed the number of reprov'd sinners, if we take into the calculation of the elect the immense multitudes of angels and other heavenly spirits who perpetually surround the Throne of God, because the nine choirs of angels and whole celestial hierarchy are, beyond comprehension, more numerous than all the descendants or the whole posterity of Adam, from the creation to the very end of the world. But if the entire race of Adam be considered separately and apart by themselves; in this case the number of the elect amongst them is by many degrees smaller than the number of the reprov'd, or there are vastly more human beings damned than saved. Some writers do not hesitate to compare the *many* that are lost to the numberless flakes of snow and drops of water which fall from the heavens on a winter's day; whilst, on the other hand, they draw similies from the Scripture, and compare the number of those who are chosen and saved to the few ears of corn that are picked up by the gleaners during the harvest, and to the few scattered grapes which escape the workman's eye in the vintage time. When the calculation is confined to Christians only, it is generally supposed and believed that the number of the elect amongst them is much greater than the number of the reprov'd, provided all the young children who die in their baptismal innocence be comprised and included in the number; but if we abstract from such, children who depart this life in the sanctity of their baptism, and count only the adults who attain to the age of reason and understanding, it is the common opinion that there are many more grown-up Christians lost than saved, and, of course, the number of the elect among them is but small, comparatively speaking. If you ask whence comes this? the reply is easy: From their own demerits, and from their refusing or neglecting to perform the conditions which God requires on their part in order to obtain salvation, namely, to believe what God teaches, and to obey what He commands. In short, there are only two ways that lead to heaven and life everlasting—the way of innocence, and the way of penance; and there are but few Christians, comparatively speaking.

who bid fair for entering heaven, either by the one way or by the other, as I will endeavor to show you in the following discourse. How few there are who go to heaven by the way of innocence shall be the subject of the first point; how few go to heaven by the way of penance shall be the subject of the second point. Let us previously implore the divine assistance, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin. *Ave Maria.*

Innocence is undoubtedly a sure road to heavenly Jerusalem, *into which nothing that is defiled will be admitted*; but if we except infants, who after their baptism are mercifully withdrawn from the dangers of this sinful Babylon, *before malice has time to corrupt their understanding*, how few are there now-a-days, who pass through the road of innocence to the happy mansions of everlasting bliss! Where are those pure souls to be found among the adult who have never been guilty of any actual sin, in thought, word, or deed! How few are there to be met with in this degenerate age who constantly live up to the maxims of the Gospel and to the rules of Christianity! Not to speak of the whole race of mankind, nor of the numberless multitudes of idolators who dwell in those wide-extended nations that stretch beyond the tropics, nor of the various tribes of infidels that people the back settlements of America; not to mention the many millions of pagans who inhabit the extensive empires of Turkey, of Persia, of Tartary, of China, and other populous countries in Asia; not to speak, I say, of all these unbelievers, who live and die not only in the state of original sin, but likewise under the guilt of many actual sins, which they voluntarily commit against the inborn law of nature, whereof they cannot be supposed to be invincibly ignorant, what shall we think of the generality of Christians, even in Europe! How few, comparatively speaking, are there to be found amongst them who are truly virtuous, and who make Heaven their chief concern! How few who inviolably preserve, to the end of their lives, that sacred treasure of sanctifying grace which they received at the baptismal font, and of which Jesus Christ will demand a strict account on the dreadful day of judgment! How many, on the other hand, are there among them who separate themselves from the fold of Christ by schism and heresy, and who live in an open violation of the laws of God and His Church! How many are there who by their immoralties dishonor the sacred character they bear, and promiscuously perpetrate those odious and shameful crimes which, as the Apostle says, should not even be named among Christians, and which

he assures us (Galat. v. 19,) exclude for ever from the kingdom of Heaven !

There are, indeed, the Lord be praised, some happy souls, who like Noah preserve themselves untainted amidst the general corruption ; for the Church of Christ never was, and never will be destitute of saints, even in the worst of times ; but there is reason to fear that out of ten thousand of the adult, there is not, perhaps, one to be found so happy as to carry the white robe of his baptismal innocence from the font to the coffin, without having stained it with some actual sins. Such is the corruption of the world, such is the depravity of human nature since the fall of our first parents, that we almost all begin from our childhood to deviate from the right road, and *decline from the way of virtue*, as the Royal Prophet remarks—Ps. xiii. The first use we commonly make of our heart is to misplace our affections on created objects, and to transgress the great commandment of loving the Lord our God above all things. Our first inclinations are generally vicious, and prompt us to follow the suggestions of blind self-love, and to have no other view but to please ourselves, and satisfy our own will. We are apt to be led astray by a long train of dangerous passions, which form a kind of mist or cloud before our eyes, and hinder us from seeing the beauty of virtue and the deformity of vice in their proper colors, until our reason ripens on the sad remains of shipwrecked innocence.

To be more fully convinced that few adult Christians enter heaven by the gate of innocence, we need only take a general view of the common life of the professors of Christianity ; for is it not evident that the generality of them violate their baptismal vows, and that their lives are a direct contradiction to their profession and religious principles ? They are hurried on by the impetuosity of their passions ; they are constantly occupied in seeking enjoyments and interests incompatible with true virtue, and they seem to be intent on nothing so much as the gratification of every unlawful desire ; they forsake the narrow, painful way of the cross, and run with the crowd into the broad and flowery road of criminal pleasures. *Concupiscence of the flesh, concupiscence of the eyes, and pride of life*, are the three idols to which they pay their homage, in opposition to, and in contempt of the living God. If we examine from the palace to the cottage, from the most elevated to the lowest condition of life, we shall find vice reigning amongst every class of men ; we shall scarce see any thing else amongst the great but inordinate ambition, pride, irreligion, a barefaced contempt of piety, liber-

tinism, dissipation, criminal excesses, oppression of the poor, and a shameful abuse of power and authority. Those who move in a lower sphere, and whose circumstances do not permit them to indulge their natural inclinations, are seldom more innocent; interest is with the generality of them the sole rule and standard of all their actions; they allow themselves little or no time to think of the great concerns of eternity, or if they spare an odd half hour in the course of a whole week to attend the public worship and great sacrifice of the Mass on the Lord's day, it is with languor and tepidity, with coldness and indifference. What they are really in earnest about, is the providing the necessaries, the conveniences, the comforts and satisfactions of this transitory life. Instead of seeking first the kingdom of Heaven, instead of sanctifying their worldly occupations, by performing them for God's honor and glory, and with a view of pleasing Him, and discharging their respective duties, their first and principal object is to increase their possessions, to maintain their station, and keep up their importance on earth, for which purpose they are disposed for any act of fraud and injustice, from which they may possibly derive any benefit or emolument; for it is remarkable that their religion and piety decrease in proportion as their wealth and riches increase.

It is also remarkable that those very states which are most proper to excite Christians to the practice of virtue, and to procure the salvation of their souls, such as poverty, afflictions, and sufferings, become the occasion of sin and damnation to thousands, by the bad dispositions of those who suffer and are afflicted; so that if prosperity hurries on a great number to eternal perdition, because it blinds them and makes them forget God, adversity is equally destructive to as many, since it causes them to murmur against Divine Providence and repine against the will of Heaven. If riches are a grand obstacle to salvation, on account of the bad use commonly made of them, poverty likewise sends numbers to hell by the bad use that is made of it. Thus it happens that the powerful and the feeble, the rich and the poor, help and assist to damn each other. The powerful oppress and ruin the weak, and by this means entail damnation on themselves; the weak are exasperated and enraged against the powerful, and thus they damn themselves in like manner; the rich grind the faces of the poor, and therefore are liable to fall victims to God's eternal vengeance; the poor envy, defraud, and injure the rich, and thus they are equally exposed to perish eternally. Did time but permit me to take a cursory view of the dif-

ferent branches of trade, and the particular states in which Christians engage themselves, we would discover a thousand low artifices and illegal practices which they recur to in order to deceive, cheat, and circumvent each other. How many are there who seem to place their duty in the transgression of it, neglecting what is commanded and doing what is forbid ; parents are either careless in the education of their children, or children are without due respect and obedience to their parents ; husbands are cruel to their wives, or wives are deficient in that love and submission which they owe to their husbands ; masters and mistresses are overbearing and tyrannical to their servants and domestics, or domestics and servants are insolent and unfaithful to their masters and mistresses. In fine, there are but very few, comparatively speaking, who perfectly comply with every part of their duty ; very few whose virtue is not mingled with some alloy of corruption, and accompanied with many defects and blemishes ; very few who sincerely in their hearts prefer God to all things, and are constantly in a disposition of mind rather to lose all, and suffer all, than offend Him, and consequently there are but very few who can pretend a right to heaven on the title of innocence. Let us now examine, and be yourselves judges, if more souls go to heaven by the way of penance : this is what I promised to show you in the second point. When I say that there are but few, comparatively speaking, who can claim a right to heaven in quality of true penitents, I do not mean that there are but few who have recourse to the sacrament of Penance ; for it is to be supposed that, except libertines and profligates, who make open profession of licentiousness and impiety, and who are neither afraid nor ashamed to trample upon all laws, both divine and human ; it is to be supposed, I say, that except men of this description, the generality of the faithful acquit themselves in some manner of this duty at or about the holy time of Easter, that is to say, the great number confess their sins ; but it is to be feared that amongst this great number there are but few who can be styled true Gospel penitents, and consequently there are but few of them to be saved, since to do penance is absolutely necessary to salvation, according to this terrible sentence, pronounced by Jesus Christ Himself : *Unless you do penance you shall all perish.* For what is a true Gospel penitent ! A penitent, says Tertullian, is he who has always a deep sense of his great misfortune in having lost the favor and friendship of his God, and who has incessantly before his eyes the sad image and remembrance of his sins, and is affected by a

true and sincere sorrow for them. A penitent is he who frequently repasses, in the bitterness of his soul, those years he spent in vice, and detests and heartily bewails the crimes by which he has offended the Almighty ; a penitent is he who leads a new life, and endeavors to expiate his past sins by the laborious exercises of penance and mortification, thereby to prevent the dreadful punishments which he has deserved, and which the justice of God has a right to inflict ; a penitent, in fine, is a person charged with the interest of God's justice against himself, who looks therefore on his body as an enemy that must be weakened, as a rebel that must be chastised, as a delinquent to whom all favor and indulgence should be refused, as a criminal destined to die, because he no longer deserves to live ; and consequently his dress, his actions, his whole deportment should bespeak austerity, mortification, and compunction.

Such is the character of a true Gospel penitent ; but, my brethren, penitents of this kind, where are they to be found ? The early years of Christianity could indeed boast of penitents of this character ; in those happy times sinners of all ranks were frequently seen prostrate at the gates of the churches, covered with sackcloth and ashes, crying out to Heaven for mercy, striking their breasts, like the publican, with grief, and conjuring their brethren who entered into the house of God to obtain for them by their prayers the pardon and remission of their crimes. For a single mortal sin they passed whole years in the painful exercises of fasting, praying and weeping, and debarred even of innocent recreation ; they allowed themselves no other comfort but that of tears and repentance, because they had the misfortune to offend the Lord their God. Such were the true penitents in the primitive ages of Christianity, and thus they endeavored to efface and expiate their past sins. The least vestige or trace of this ancient discipline and penitential spirit is, now-a-days, scarce visible in the conduct and deportment of the generality of modern Christians. If fasting, or any other work of mortification be enjoined them as a salutary penance ; if the observance of the Lent, the Fridays and Saturdays, and other days of abstinence prescribed by the Church be insisted on as a necessary duty, a thousand excuses are immediately framed. If you take their own word for it, their health is impaired ; they are of a delicate constitution ; their state of life will not admit either of fasting or abstinence ; it is too heavy a burden, which they are unable to bear. In quality of Christians, they are followers of a Leader who was crowned with thorns, and disciples

of a Master who lived in sufferings and died in torments ; and yet they can scarce abide to hear talk of penance or mortification, of fasting or self-denial, much less to practice them, though their manifold and grievous sins cry aloud to Heaven for vengeance. In short, they either totally neglect the sacrament of Penance, and live and die in a state of final impenitence, or they approach the sacred tribunal without the necessary dispositions, without any hearty sorrow for their sins, without a firm and sincere purpose of amendment. Judge then, my brethren, if the greatest part of the faithful can claim a right to heaven in quality of true and sincere penitents. Judge if you yourselves can ground your pretensions to life everlasting on the same title.

As a farther proof of the great number of Christians who perish eternally, how many are there that wrong and defraud their neighbor, and how many make restitution ! The first are almost without number, and the second very rare. Of a hundred persons you will scarce find one but complains of having suffered some damage by fraud and injustice ; and notwithstanding, what restitution do we see made ! What satisfaction for the damage done ! This is what the fraudulent and unjust do not even think of, and still nothing more certainly entails damnation on them than a neglect of this duty ; nothing being more clear than they shall perish eternally, if, having it in their power to do it, they will not restore the property of their neighbor whom they have defrauded, and repair the damage they have willingly caused. After this, need we require other proofs to be convinced that there are incomparably more souls damned than saved, and that even in the midst of Christianity there are few who enter heaven by the gate of penance, in comparison of the great numbers that are lost for ever, because they do not repent in the sincerity of their hearts, nor produce the fruits that are worthy of penance. How many habitual and relapsing sinners are there to be found amongst the penitents of our days, who are constantly replunging into the same favorite vices, and refuse to shun the dangerous occasions of sin, or take any pains to restrain their passions and overcome their evil habits ! How many are there who, abusing the mercy of God, and presumptuously relying on the uncertainty of a death-bed repentance, put off their conversion to the end of their life, and resolve to quit sin only in their old age, when sin may be said to quit them ! Old age may indeed disengage a sinner from the follies of youth ; adversity, the loss of health, a wrecked constitution, worn out in the pursuit of vice, and exhausted by criminal excesses, may chill his

blood, quench the fire of his passions, restrain the inordinate inclinations of his heart, and give a natural aversion to sin. His crimes, of course, may cease then ; but is he for this reason to be deemed a sincere penitent? Or is it to be supposed that he can command at will a true sorrow and compunction of heart, with a hatred and detestation of sin, because it is offensive to God's infinite goodness? No, my brethren, the sorrow such sinners have for their sins often amounts to no more than a wish that they could continue to sin with impunity. The offense given to God is a matter they seldom consider ; they regard nothing in religion but its menaces, and the torments of a hereafter ; and were there no hell to be feared, it is to be apprehended that they would live and die like atheists, without faith, religion, and remorse of conscience. If so, my brethren, as undoubtedly is the case of numbers of false penitents, have I not reason to conclude that the generality of Christians do not bid fair for entering the kingdom of Heaven, either by the gate of innocence or by the gate of penance? Perhaps you will object and say, that the great God is merciful, and that He did not put you into the world to damn you. Merciful He is, indeed ; praise, honor, and glory be to His holy name, and were it not for His boundless mercy we would be all lost and undone for ever ; but He is equally just and faithful to His promises, and He has nowhere promised to admit all sinners into the kingdom of Heaven, but He has expressly declared the reverse. He has not put you into the world to damn you ; but let me ask you, did He put you into the world to be wicked, to be unjust, to be lewd, to be revengeful, to defame and detract, to rob and cheat your neighbor, to be drunkards, cursers, swearers and blasphemers? No, my brethren, God has put you into the world to love and serve Him ; and if, instead of loving and serving Him, you constantly offend Him and transgress His commandments, it is your own fault if you are not saved. It is you yourselves who damn yourselves, and the Lord may justly say to you as He formerly did to the Jews : *Israel, thy perdition is entirely owing to thyself*. He created you without your own assistance, says St. Augustine, but He will not save you without your own concurrence. He requires the co-operation of your own free will with the graces which in His mercy He dispenses, and it is for want of this co-operation that of the *many who are called so few are chosen*. Awake then, O sinners, from the fatal lethargy of sin, and labor in good earnest to be of the small number of God's elect. Contend to "enter ye in at the narrow gate ;" for *wide is the gate,*

and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat; but narrow is the gate, and strait is the way that leadeth to life, and few there are that find it, as Christ our Lord expressly says in the Gospel—Matt. vii. 13, 14. If, therefore, my brethren, you have had the misfortune to shut the gate of innocence against yourselves, you still have a resource. The gate of penance is yet open, and you have it in your power to recover the friendship of God, and to carry the kingdom of Heaven by means of a true and sincere conversion. An affair of such importance admits of no delay, but requires your most serious attention and application. All is gained if heaven be gained; and if heaven be lost all is lost, and lost for ever without resource. O, let me entreat you to sleep no longer on the brink of hell, and in the arms of perdition. Remember that the sword of divine justice is unsheathed, and hangs over your head, supported only by the slender thread of life, a thread which may break every moment; and should it happen to break, and death surprise you in a bad state, defiled with sin, and void of virtue and merits, eternal misery must inevitably be your doom.

Let the terrifying truths which I have announced to you this day inspire you with a salutary fear, but let your fear be always accompanied with confidence in the mercies of God, and the merits of your Blessed Redeemer. O amiable Jesus! we humbly prostrate ourselves at Thy feet; we throw ourselves into the arms of Thy tender mercy, with a firm hope and confidence in Thy goodness, that Thou wilt not suffer our souls to be eternally lost, since they have cost Thee the last drop of Thy precious blood. Draw us to Thee by Thy all-powerful grace and the bonds of divine love, that after loving and serving Thee here on earth, we may be admitted hereafter into the number of those happy souls who are to be in Thy presence for ever. This is the blessing which I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON THE RESPECT DUE TO THE HOUSE OF GOD.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. The house of God.
- II. The sanctity of temples under the Old Law, and of religious edifices under the New.
- III. The reverence and piety with which such places should be treated.
- IV. How Christ revered the Temple.

Domus mea domus orationis est.—*St. Luc. c. xix. v. 46.*

My house is the house of prayer.—*St. Luke, c. xix. v. 46.*

THE universe may be considered as one extensive habitation and spacious temple, formed by the almighty power of God, and replenished with His divine presence, according to the remark of the Prophet Baruch (iii. 24, 25), where he cries out with astonishment: *O how great is the House of God, and how vast is the place of his possession! It is great and hath no end; it is high and immense.* A serious consideration hereof, caused King David to cry out to God, in Ps. cxxxviii.: "Where shall I go, O Lord, to hide myself from Thy spirit? Where shall I fly from before Thy face? If I ascend up to heaven Thou art there; if I descend down to hell Thou art there also; if I take wings to fly to the extremity of the earth, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, 'tis Thy hand that guides me, and Thy right hand that shall hold me. I said to myself, perhaps the darkness may cover me; but I know that even the darkest night becomes luminous to show me to Thee; for darkness, O my God, is not obscure to Thee, nor is the night to Thee less clear than mid-day." Thus this holy king reasoned with himself, concluding from thence that he was under an obligation to hold himself always in the presence of his God, and never to forget that He is everywhere, that He sees all things, knows all things, and fills all things with His immensity. St. Augustine, speaking of the immensity of God, figures it to himself as a vast ocean, in which all creatures, to use his expression, are swallowed up and penetrated with the essence of God, without ever being able to come out of Him or to disengage themselves from Him, because they are present to Him by the necessity of their being. Is it not then just that man, who is an intelligent a-!

rational creature, should honor and respect God in all places, and walk continually in His presence, without ever straying away or losing sight of it, especially as there is not a greater preservative against sin, nor a more powerful incentive to virtue, than to remember always that God sees us, and that He is a witness not only of our actions, but likewise of our most secret intentions.

However, as a great part of the earth which we inhabit is either contaminated with vice, or laid out for temporal affairs and profane purposes, and as our manifold necessities and worldly avocations do not allow us to be at all times, and in all places, in that respectful posture and devout employment with which we should endeavor to present ourselves before the infinite majesty of God, it was expedient that some particular places should be sanctified and set apart for this sacred and religious purpose. Hence we read in the Old Testament that certain places have been particularly chosen, sanctified, and appropriated to the divine worship, both in the law of nature and under the written law of Moses, and that the Almighty God Himself has been pleased to manifest the wonderful effects of His power and goodness in these places more frequently and more copiously than in others; for as He thought proper to make choice of some particular times in preference to others for displaying the riches of His mercy, and to appoint certain festival days to be devoted in a special manner to His divine service, though He is equally Lord and Master of all days and of all times, so He has likewise thought proper to choose certain particular places in preference to others for His special habitation, there to receive the homage and submission of His faithful servants, and to bestow His gracious favors and blessings more readily and more abundantly, though in the interim He is intimately present in all places, fills the wide expanse of heaven and earth with His immensity, and cannot be limited or confined within the precincts or walls of any material edifice, like unto the idols and false gods of the Gentiles, as St. Paul speaks—Acts, vii. My present design is to take a comparative view of the types and figures of the Old Law, and of the asylums of piety and religion which, in the New Law of grace, are dedicated to the worship of God by the solemn consecration and benediction of the Holy Catholic Church. The transcendent sanctity of these sacred places shall be the subject of the first point. The great respect that is due to them, and the profound reverence and edifying piety with which we ought to conduct ourselves therein, shall be the subject of the second point. Let us previously

invoke the assistance of the Divine Spirit, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, &c. *Ave Maria.*

The Book of Genesis informs us (c. xxviii.) that the Lord appeared to Jacob at Bethel in the mysterious vision of a ladder, the foot of which stood upon the ground, the top seemingly reaching to heaven, and numbers of angels ascending and descending by it. Whereupon Jacob, trembling and filled with awe, adored the Divine Majesty, as there present; and having erected a stone for a title, he poured oil on it and cried out: *How awful is this place! It is truly no other than the dwelling-place of God, and the gate of heaven; the Lord is most certainly here, and I knew it not.* The holy patriarch was not ignorant that the Lord was present in all places by His immensity; but until then he knew not that the Lord had chosen that particular place, and sanctified it by a special presence, which required a peculiar respect and veneration. The Almighty appeared likewise to Noah, Abraham, and other Holy Patriarchs and Prophets, and they accordingly erected altars to His honor, and worshiped Him in the particular places where He had appeared to them, and had given them sensible marks of His special presence; but Solomon was the first man that ever erected a permanent temple to the living God. During the forty years that the children of Israel were traveling through the desert, they had no other place of worship but a portable temple, that is to say, the tabernacle which was erected in the middle of their camp by the express orders of God Himself, who was pleased to accept the vows, oblations, and sacrifices of His people in that particular place. When they arrived at Jerusalem, and were formed into a commonwealth, He ordered a magnificent temple to be built in that city, that they might invoke His holy name therein, and adore Him with greater splendor and solemnity. The amazing grandeur and magnificence of that temple served to inspire them with a reverential awe and respect; it was so august, and upon so grand a scale, so highly embellished and so richly decorated, that the view of it impressed their minds with some idea of the beauty and splendor of heavenly Jerusalem, and of the infinite grandeur and glory of God. The Scripture tells us, that when the solemnity of its dedication was completed, the majesty of God filled the whole temple, and having caused fire to descend from heaven and consume the prodigious number of holocausts that were offered on the occasion, the Lord was pleased to appear to Solomon, and assured him that he *had chosen that holy place for his own habitation, and that his eyes would be open, and*

his ears would be attentive to the prayers which his people would offer therein. Hence, Daniel in his captivity, opened his window toward Jerusalem three times a day, and prayed with his face toward the Temple, when he could not go there in person. The Jews were accustomed to flock to it from all parts, in order to adore and glorify the Lord in it, by the most solemn acts of religion. They held this holy Temple in such respect and veneration that they were accustomed to premise several ablutions and purifications before they would venture even to approach the exterior court that served as a barrier to keep them at a greater distance from the Holy of Holies, which was in the interior court of the Temple. None but the priests were permitted to enter into the interior court, every other person being forbid under pain of being stoned to death. Nay, the Holy of Holies was inaccessible to every one except the High Priest himself, who, after many preparatory exercises of religion, was allowed to enter into it once a year, with the blood of the immolated victims, this sacred place being a figure of Heaven, which was shut against man till Christ, our High Priest, entered there, covered with His own precious blood, as the Apostle speaks—Heb. ix.

Such, my brethren, was the respect the people of God, in the Old Law, paid to these sanctified places, which were appropriated in a special manner to the divine service; such, in particular, was the reverential awe and veneration which the Jews testified with regard to the Temple of Jerusalem, and which God Himself enforced with so much rigor that He punished the least profanation of it with great severity. In the Book of Leviticus, chap. xix., He expressly commanded them to *reverence his sanctuary*, and to do nothing in it but what tended to His honor and regarded His worship. Nay, He ordered Aaron and his sons to wash their hands and feet before they approached the altar and tabernacle, and Moses to take off his shoes when he approached the burning bush, out of respect to the holy ground whereon he stood; and He forbid the Israelites even to approach the holy mount, on which the Law of the Ten Commandments was published.

These examples are recorded in Holy Writ for our instruction, and are so many convincing proofs of the singular respect that is due to those Christian temples and sacred houses of religious worship, which under the New Law of the Gospel are dedicated to the honor of God, and sanctified in a particular manner by His special presence. It must be acknowledged that they are by many degrees more holy and more

venerable than the Jewish Temple, or any of the other ancient types and figures, as these were no more than empty shadows of the good things which Christ was to confer on us. Our churches, chapels, and oratories, are by excellency the *houses of God*, and are therefore styled by the Prophet the *new heavens on earth* which were promised to the children of the New Testament. Here there are no barriers between God and His people as there were in the Temple of Jerusalem. Our Divine Redeemer has destroyed the wall of separation that kept mankind at so great a distance from the Holy of Holies. Here it is not the flesh of oxen, sheep, or other animals that is offered up in sacrifice, as in the Temple of Jerusalem, but the immaculate flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, the innocent Lamb of God and Saviour of the world. It is the very same adorable victim which was once offered up in a bloody manner on Mount Calvary, that is here immolated on our altars in an unbloody manner; it is the same precious blood which flowed upon the cross, that continues here to plead our cause, and to cry aloud to Heaven for mercy on our behalf; it is, in fine, the pure oblation and commemorative sacrifice of the New Law that is here offered up every day, and that surpasses all the sacrifices of the Old Law as much as the substance and reality surpass the shadow and figure, or as much as Christ Himself in person and dignity exceeds all the victims that were formerly immolated. O what would the pious Israelites have done, with what sentiments of religion would they have been penetrated, if they had possessed in their temple the heavenly treasures, favors, and blessings which Christians enjoy in their churches and chapels! With what fervour and zeal would the holy King David have been inflamed and actuated! He, who cried out to the Lord (Ps. xxv.): *I have loved. O Lord, the beauty of thy house, and the place where thy glory dwelleth.* The Scripture tells us that he paid such respect and honor to the very Ark of the Covenant, that he danced before it in transports of joy, and caused it to be brought in triumph to the capital of his kingdom, amidst the sounds of musical instruments and the joyful acclamations of a numberless multitude of his subjects. Josue and the elders of Israel prostrated themselves also before it with the most profound reverence and humility, and the people with a holy emulation contributed such quantities and heaps of their most valuable effects, their plate, their rings, their bracelets, their finest stuffs and richest ornaments, for the purpose of decorating the tabernacle, that Moses found it necessary to give them notice, by a public crier, to bring no more—Exod. xxv.

Yet what was their tabernacle? What was their ark? What did their ark contain but the two tables of the Decalogue, the rod of Aaron, and a small portion of the manna that fell from heaven! What was their tabernacle in comparison of the tabernacles and sanctuaries of the Holy Catholic Church, wherein is deposited the most holy, the most inestimable treasure in the world, the most venerable sacrament of the Blessed Eucharist, wherein Jesus Christ, the living Ark of the New Testament, is really and substantially present to feed and nourish the souls of the faithful, not with corruptible manna, as the Israelites were fed in the desert, but with the true and life-giving food of angels, with the banquet of His own sacred body and blood! He remained nine months in the virginal womb of His blessed mother, forty days in the stable of Bethlehem, three hours on the cross, and three days in the sepulchre; but He is present at all hours in our sanctuaries, ready to give us a favorable audience, and to dispense His gracious favors and blessings with a boundless liberality. Here He abides with us, not only by His immensity, but also by the real presence of His sacred humanity. Here He dwells and resides among us as a king in his palace, and a sovereign on his throne, to receive our petitions, to hear our prayers, to redress our grievances, to grant our requests, and to make us partakers of the holy sacraments, which He instituted as so many fountains of grace for the sanctification of our souls. Here, in fine, He presides in the sacred tribunals of penance, in the persons of His representatives, whom He authorizes and commissions to forgive the sins of repenting sinners, with a solemn assurance, that whosoever sins they forgive on earth in His name, and by His authority, shall be forgiven in the court of Heaven, provided the penitent has recourse to His mercy with proper dispositions. Let us now briefly consider the great respect that is due to those sacred places, and the manner in which the faithful ought to present and conduct themselves therein.

The primitive Christians held their oratories and places of public worship in such respect and veneration, that, as Eusebius, the historian, informs us, whenever they assembled therein to celebrate the divine mysteries they were accustomed both at the beginning and conclusion of their religious duties to cry out, in imitation of the Patriarch Jacob : *How awful is this place! it is no other than the house of God and the gate of heaven!* The very presence of the angels, who, as St. John Chrysostom says, are here continually attending the God of all glory, was sufficient to fill them with a reverential awe, to inspire them with

sentiments of piety, and to make them say with the Prophet, when they approached the entrance of the house of God : *In the multitude of thy mercies, O Lord, I will enter thy house, adore thee in thy holy temple, confess to thy name, and sing to thy praise in the sight of thy angels.* St. Paul made use of this argument when (1 Cor. xi. 10,) he ordered a woman to have her *head modestly veiled in the church, out of respect to the angels there present.* In those early ages of Christianity the faithful were cruelly persecuted, and yet they zealously attended every day in their places of worship, at the hazard of their lives and fortunes, being persuaded that the prayers which they offered up unanimously, assembled there together in a body, were more efficacious, more prevalent, and more acceptable to God than private devotions performed at home. Far from committing any irreverences in the house of God, they behaved there in a manner becoming the disciples of a crucified Jesus, assembled together to commemorate with gratitude the dolorous mysteries of His passion and death. Their interior was recollected and elevated to Heaven by attentive and devout prayer, and their exterior was composed by a decent appearance and a modest deportment, which redounded to the honor of God and to the edification of their neighbor. They were sensible that *holiness becometh the house of God to the end of time*, as the Royal Prophet says (Ps. xcii.), and for this reason they came to it with the most profound humility, looking on themselves as unworthy to appear in the presence of the Divine Majesty, particularly when they found their conscience burdened with the guilt of sin. It is related of the great St. Jerome, that he trembled at the very thoughts of entering even into the repositories of the relics of the holy martyrs, whenever he happened to be disturbed with any little motion of anger, or to be assaulted with evil suggestions or nocturnal phantoms in his sleep.

As for the notorious and scandalous sinners, they were absolutely refused admittance into the Church until they had previously expiated their crimes, and atoned by public penance for the public scandal they had given. The ministers of the altar were accustomed to shut the gates in their face, and to repel them with these words of the Scripture (Apocal. xxii.) : *Far from hence the impure and the unclean ; far from hence all idolators, murderers, and liars ; the holy things are reserved for those who are holy.* We have a remarkable instance hereof in the Emperor Theodosius ; St. Ambrose would not suffer him to enter into the church of Milan until he had performed a rigorous

penance of eight months amongst the public penitents at the outside inclosure of the porch. With what eyes will you behold this temple ! said the holy bishop to him. With what feet will you tread in this sanctuary ! Depart, and do not attempt to aggravate the guilt of your past sins by a fresh crime. It is true, indeed, the rigor of this ancient discipline is no longer enforced ; sinners are not debarred from entering our places of public worship, nor from assisting at the holy sacrifice of the Mass, unless they be publicly excommunicated and personally denounced. However, the spirit of the Church being still unchangeably the same, though her discipline may vary with the times, she continues to exhort her children to appear always in the presence of the Divine Majesty with due reverence and respect. If they are not so happy as to be in the actual state of grace, she entreats them to come at least to the house of God free from all affection to mortal sin, and with minds occupied with pure affections ; she admonishes them to present themselves with the dispositions of the humble publican in the Gospel, with a hatred and detestation of their past sins, and a sincere desire of renouncing their evil ways, and of breaking the chains of iniquity with which they are fettered. The vessels of holy water, which are usually placed near the porches and doors, are so many monitors to remind them of the purity and cleanliness both of soul and body, with which they should endeavor to appear before the Lord their God, and to assist at the great sacrifice of the New Law.

St. Justin Martyr informs us that the pagans of his age paid such respect to their temples that they were accustomed to enter them barefooted, and that they had the picture of silence painted on the walls, with an inscription ordering the most profound silence to be observed there, and commanding all profaners to withdraw. The Turks and Mahometans of our days have likewise their mosques and their pagods, wherein they behave with all the decorum and decency that their false religion prescribes ; and shall we, my brethren, who glory in being Christians and professors of the true religion of Jesus Christ ; shall we, I say, misbehave and be guilty of irreverences and profanations in our churches and chapels ? Shall we suffer ourselves to be outdone by the very pagans themselves ? Is not their example sufficient to confound those who, instead of worshiping God in spirit and truth, and edifying their neighbor by their exemplary piety, behave, under the all-seeing eyes of their Creator, with as much levity, irreverence, and disrespect, as if they were in a play-house ? Is it not enough to cover those

Christians with shame, who carry their impiety to the very foot of the altar, and in the very midst of the divine mysteries are constantly talking, laughing, gazing, distracting and disturbing others? If the conduct of such persons be reprehensible, what are we to think of those who insult the sanctity of God's house still in a more audacious manner? What are we to judge of those who come with a wicked design, with a bad intention, with a view to pick the pockets of such as they observe to be attentive to their devotions, and to steal away whatever they can lay their sacrilegious hands on?

The dreadful punishments which the Lord has inflicted, from time to time, on the profaners of sacred things and sacred places, plainly show the enormity of this crime, and should be a warning to all persons to avoid it most carefully. Ozias, a king of Juda, who was struck with a leprosy for having thrust himself into the sanctuary and offered incense; the sons of Aaron, who were consumed by fire from heaven for having made use of profane fire in the censers; the Phillistines, who were scourged with dreadful plagues for having placed the Ark in the temple of their idol Dagon; the Bethsamites, who were punished with sudden deaths for having gazed at the Ark with an over-great curiosity; Oza, a Prince of Juda, who was struck dead on the spot for having indiscreetly touched the Ark with his hand; Heliodorus, a commissary of King Antiochus, who, as we read (Machab. ii.) was scourged almost to death by two angels from Heaven, for having attempted to rob the Temple of Jerusalem. These are so many dismal instances that prove how offensive the lowest degree of sacrilege is to the Almighty God.

We need but consider what the Gospel relates concerning our Blessed Saviour overturning the stalls and money-tables of the buyers and sellers, and whipping them out of the Temple with indignation, to be convinced what a grievous sin it is to profane and dishonor the house of God. This was the only sin, as St. Augustine remarks, that could make Jesus Christ act in a manner seemingly opposite to that heavenly sweetness and meekness which on all other occasions He always manifested to the greatest sinners, and for which He was so remarkable that the Prophet Isaias styled Him the *Prince of Peace*. He bore all His own sufferings with the most astonishing patience, but was moved to a holy anger when He saw the Temple of Jerusalem profaned. He reprov'd the world for many crimes, but He would punish with His own hands no crime but sacrilege. He employed words of mercy and indulgence to reclaim publicans and notorious sinners; but He made

use of a rod of justice to punish the profaners of His Heavenly Father's house with rigor and severity, reproaching them at the same time with having made it a house of traffic: *My house, said He, shall be called the house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves—* Luke, ix. 17. Let us, therefore, my brethren, beware of the like abuses and irreverences. Let us honor God in all places, but particularly in those sacred places which are honored by His special presence, and devoted to His worship. Let us always appear in His divine presence with due reverence and respect, and pay unto Him the just tribute of our homage with a tender and attentive piety, and with a spirit of recollection and true devotion, that after having honored and adored Him religiously in His temples here on earth, we may see and enjoy Him hereafter in the eternal temple of His glory in the heavenly Jerusalem. Which is the happiness that I heartily wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON LOVING OUR ENEMIES, AND PARDONING OFFENSES AND INJURIES.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. Christian and pagan doctrines as to the love of enemies.
- II. The love of enemies.
- III. The pardon of injuries.
- IV. Exhortation to love one's enemies.

Sic Pater meus cœlestis faciet vobis, si non remiseritis unus quisque fratri suo de cordibus vestris.—St. Matt c. xviii. v. 35.

So shall my heavenly Father do to you, unless every one of you forgive his brother from your hearts.—St. Matt. c. xviii. v. 35

THERE is no valuable quality of the mind more generally approved of in speculation, and less regarded in practice, than that of moderating our resentments, refraining from anger, and treating those who have injured us with meekness and humanity. Yet the Son of God never spoke with greater authority, nor declared His will more decisively, than in regard to this article; for He knew that none but Himself

could oblige us to forgive and love our enemies sincerely. Sovereigns and magistrates might indeed put a stop to exterior acts of vengeance, and even hinder a furious person from making use of opprobrious language; but to stretch this command to the heart, and compel us to stifle our inward resentments, and return good for evil, was the privilege of God's infinite power and justice. It is for this reason He calls it by excellence His *own commandment*. The rest He was pleased to promulge by His ministers, but this He promulged Himself, as the thing in life He most desired, and resolved to have observed most religiously.

That pagans, darkened with the clouds of infidelity, should despise and reject a law so repugnant to human pride, and so contrary to the impulses of self-love, is not to be wondered at; but that Christians, enlightened with the rays of divine grace, should loudly proclaim that to bear tamely an affront is to authorize insolence; that Christians, listening to nothing but what the impiety of a degenerate age inspires, or their own depraved nature and weakness of reason suggests and prescribes, should endeavor to extenuate the practice of a law so completely glorious, is what astonishes the preachers of the Word of God, and becomes a subject worthy of their greatest zeal and eloquence. Wherefore, I shall endeavor to show you that to love your enemies, and do good to those that hate you, is not a simple counsel, but a precept wholly divine and worthy of Him who in the Scripture is styled the *Prince of Peace*, and whose wisdom only could suggest so sublime a law, and contrive so wonderful a means to govern the universe in peace, and to unite the hearts of all the faithful in the bonds of charity. And though this law is comprised under the general precept of charity, which obliges us to love all mankind without exception or reserve, yet as it is commonly considered a part by itself, as a duty containing two members, namely, that of loving our enemies, and pardoning injuries, I shall briefly lay before you the indispensable obligation and necessity of complying both with the one and with the other. But let us first invoke the assistance of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of that immaculate Virgin, who was replenished with the richest treasures of His divine grace. *Ave Maria.*

It was a common error among the Jewish sectaries to confine the love of their neighbor to the sole love of their friends and the people of their own nation, and to exclude all others; nay, the Scribes and Pharisees imagined it lawful to hate their enemies and to retaliate injuries. But our Divine Redeemer, who came down from heaven to

kindle the fire of charity on earth, took care to condemn their erroneous doctrine, and to teach His disciples that brotherly love is a debt which we owe all mankind, and which no provocation or offense can ever cancel. "*You have heard,*" says He in the Gospel, "*that it was said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; but I say to you not to resist the evil.*" You have heard that it was said, thou shalt love thy neighbor and thou shalt hate thy enemy; but I say to you love your enemies, do good to those that hate you, and pray for those who persecute you and utter calumnies against you; to the end you may be the children of your Father, who is in Heaven, who maketh His sun rise upon the good and the bad, and raineth upon the just and unjust; for if you love those that love you, what reward shall you have? Do not even the publicans do this? And if you salute your brethren only, what do you more? Do not even the publicans do this?"—Matt. v. It is neither a Moses, nor an Elias, nor any earthly prince or judge that lays down these rules, but it is Jesus Christ, whom our sins have fastened to a cross; it is that Sovereign Lord and all-powerful Judge, who is to decide our endless misery or perpetual happiness for time and eternity. He not only inculcated this divine law by His word at His first and last sermon, but also vouchsafed to enforce it by His own example; for what was His whole life but one continued practice of love and charity to His enemies! Was it not His love for His enemies that brought Him down from heaven, clothed Him with the human nature, and made Him endure the greatest hardships, humiliations, and sufferings? All the base treatment He received from the Jews could not hinder Him from spending three whole years amongst them in continual endeavors to procure their everlasting happiness. He wrought all kind of miracles during that time, for the sake of a people the most ungrateful that ever lived upon the face of the earth, and who, He knew, were to repay all His favors with a most ignominious death. When two of His disciples, John and James, requested that He would cause fire to descend from the heavens to burn the Samaritans, for having refused Him admittance into their city, did He not reprimand them severely, and say: *You know not of what spirit you are; the Son of Man is not come to destroy souls, but to save them.* At His last supper, did He not prostrate Himself at the feet of the traitor Judas with the most amazing humility, and wash and wipe them with the same marks of love and tender affection, as if he were one of His truest friends? Did not He not afterwards embrace him most lovingly

in the Garden of Olives, and miraculously heal the right ear of Malchus, who came treacherously to seize on His sacred person? If we follow Him to Mount Calvary, we shall find Him in the midst of His most painful agony on the cross, forgetting Himself and imploring mercy and pardon for His cruel executioners at the very time they were spilling His precious blood. *Father forgive them, said He, for they know not what they do.* Thus it was, my brethren, that our Heavenly Legislator spent His last breath in fervent prayer for His murderers, preaching charity and patience from the pulpit of the cross, and recommending by His own example the strict observance of that favorite precept and divine law which, during the course of His mortal life, He had so warmly and so frequently inculcated as the characteristic badge and mark that was to distinguish His disciples from the rest of mankind. *It is hereby, says He (John, xiii. 35), that all men shall know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another.*

The very genius and spirit of Christianity consists in this godlike disposition, and it is vain for us without it to assume to ourselves the honor of bearing the name of Christians. In vain do we pretend to be followers of the meek and humble Jesus, unless we be in charity with our brethren, love our enemies, and encounter their malice with the arms of patience, meekness, and humility. *He that hateth his brother, says St. John, is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because the darkness hath blinded his eyes—1 Epist. c. ii. v. 11.* And again, (c. iii. v. 14, 15,): *He that loveth not, abideth in death, and whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer, because he thereby murders his own soul by depriving it of the life of grace, and the hopes of eternal life.* Whilst he remains in that unhappy state, his fasts, his prayers and offerings are not acceptable in the sight of God, who prefers the duty of fraternal love to sacrifice, though sacrifice is the highest honor we can pay to His sovereign majesty; for this reason Christ our Lord says, in St. Matt. v. 23, 24: *If, therefore, thou offer thy gift at the altar, and there thou remember that thy brother hath any thing against thee, leave there thy offering before the altar, and go first to be reconciled to thy brother, and then coming thou shalt offer thy gift.*

You will say, perhaps, that it is difficult for flesh and blood to love an enemy, to put up with an injury, and to be reconciled to those that hate us. I own it is difficult to embrace our friends and foes with the same complacency and tenderness of heart; but are we not sensible that the holy religion we profess is not an incentive to flatter our weakness

and gratify our senses, but to restrain and enervate our passions, and destroy our prejudices? Do we not know that the kingdom of Heaven is to be carried by a holy violence to our corrupt nature? Is not the reward of a happy eternity capable of making an impression on our souls and enforcing a passage to our hearts? Is it not possible, with the assistance of divine grace, *to overcome evil by good*, to conquer the malice of an enemy by meekness, and to repay an injury with charity and benevolence? And ought we, who after a thousand reiterated crimes, have received numberless proofs of God's mercy, to think it severe, mean, or despicable to love and forgive for His sake those who have injured and offended us? Are we not happy to have it in our power to obtain the pardon of our manifold offenses upon such favorable terms? Our case, in reference to Almighty God on the one hand, and our neighbor on the other, is similar to that of the servant mentioned in this day's Gospel, who being summoned to give up his accounts, and being found indebted to his master in the sum of ten thousand talents, which he was unable to discharge, was forgiven the whole debt upon his humbly imploring mercy; for if we look into the state of our conscience, we shall perhaps have reason to apprehend a more heavy load of debt lying upon our own souls. We shall acknowledge that every mortal sin we have been guilty of in our life is an immense debt, a sum, alas! of ten thousand talents, which we are utterly unable to discharge of ourselves. However, the Lord is as ready to forgive us this immense debt as the master was to forgive his servant, provided we imitate in some measure His goodness, in compassionating our neighbors and forgiving the trifling debt and small offense for which they are indebted to us. But if we imitate the unmerciful servant, who, instead of having patience with his fellow-servant, and allowing him some time for the payment of the hundred pence he owed, seized on him with open violence and cast him into confinement; if, I say, we harden our hearts in this manner, and show no mercy to our brethren, we must expect to be treated hereafter like him, with the utmost rigor, and to be delivered over to the ministers of God's severe justice, until we shall have paid the last farthing; for, as Christ says in the conclusion of the aforesaid parable: *It is thus my Heavenly Father shall treat you, unless every one of you forgive his brother from your heart.* Lest we should ever forget or lose sight of this great duty, He has thought proper to insert the following petition in the form of daily prayer, which He has taught us: *Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us,*

after which He took an occasion to enlarge upon this petition alone, and said: *If you forgive men their offenses, your Heavenly Father will forgive you also your offenses; but if you will not forgive men, neither will your Father forgive you your offenses*—Matt. vi. 14, 15. This plainly shows that to forgive our brethren sincerely from the heart all the injuries and offenses they commit against us is a condition absolutely necessary in order to obtain from God the forgiveness of our own sins. How then can we without trembling repeat these words: *Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive*, if our heart tells us, at the same time, that we do not forgive? Is it not calling for justice instead of mercy, for vengeance instead of compassion, unless we forgive? Is it not bespeaking our own condemnation, and a denial of the pardon we sue for in reciting the Lord's Prayer? Christians who are about approaching the sacred tribunal of penance, and who wish to be qualified for the benefit of the sacramental absolution, should reflect seriously on these important truths, and lay aside all rancor and ill-will, resentments and animosities. They must, in the sincerity of their hearts, forgive all those who have offended and injured them, if they expect to be forgiven themselves; for though in other respects they may be seemingly well disposed, yet as long as they persist in an unforgiving revengeful temper, and harbor hatred and malice in their hearts to any one person in the world, they are utterly unworthy of the mercy they sue for; their repentance is no better in the sight of God than a mockery, their confession is void, the absolution they deceitfully receive is null, and instead of discharging their debts, they only increase their reckoning, and return back with the additional guilt of sacrilege. What is more, if they die in that state, there is no room for mercy, since as St. James (ii. 13) assures us, *Judgment without mercy shall be dealt out to him who hath not shown mercy*; God will deal with him, in this respect, just as he shall have dealt with his neighbor, according to these words of the Gospel: *With what measure you shall measure to others, it shall be measured to you again*—Luke, vi. 38.

If we consult the Old Testament, we shall find that the great duty of fraternal love for enemies, and of forgiving injuries and offenses received, was reduced to practice long before the promulgation of the Evangelical Law. What shall we say of the Patriarch Joseph with regard to his brethren, who had combined against his life, and sold him as a slave to be carried away from his father's house into Egypt! What an illustrious example of forbearance and charity do we also behold in King

David, with regard to his mortal enemy Saul, who sought all opportunities to take away his life, and was so much incensed against everyone that relieved David, or showed him any kindness in his greatest distress, that for this reason he caused all the inhabitants of Nob to be massacred, without even sparing the children, or the brute animals themselves, and ordered Abimelech, with fourscore and four priests, to be put to death, because they had given David some of the sanctified loaves to eat during the time of his exile. Notwithstanding all this unheard-of cruelty, David loved Saul most affectionately, spoke favorably of him wherever he went, and rendered him all the good services in his power, at the very time that Saul thirsted after his innocent blood, and was searching the mountains and dark caverns of the earth where he supposed David was hiding, in order to find him and put him instantly to death. On one of these occasions, David, accompanied with a number of his trusty friends, happened to meet Saul alone in a solitary place, where, had he been disposed to be revenged, he might have easily secured his own life, and peaceable possession of the royal crown of Israel for himself and his family after ; but he was so far from laying violent hands on him, that he dismissed him unhurt, after cutting off the skirt of Saul's robe, to show that he had him in his power. This made St. John Chrysostom say : As often as I reflect on the meekness and charity of King David, finding his greatest enemy alone in a solitary cave, I look upon that cave as a temple, where he offered unto God the most acceptable of all sacrifices, not that he sacrificed the flesh of animals there, but because he surmounted his own anger, and resisted all desire of revenge, which is a thousand times more agreeable to the Lord ; he acquired more glory in suffering Saul to go away unhurt than he acquired by defeating the formidable giant Goliath, and cutting off his head ; he stood in no need of a sling, a stone, or a sword ; he obtained, without weapons, the most signal of all victories in forgiving his enemy ; he did not return from the field of battle, carrying the head of a giant in his hands, but subduing the most violent of all passions. The women and daughters of Israel did not sing as they did after the defeat of Goliath, *Saul killed a thousand, and David ten thousand*, but the angels in heaven, who were faithful witnesses of his sincere charity, proclaimed his victory, and published his glory among the blessed.

Say no longer, then, my brethren, that it is impossible to love your enemies, and do good to those who pursue you with the greatest malice, hatred, and disdain. Christ does not command impossibilities ; *his yoke*

is sweet, and his burden is light. Thousands of holy martyrs amongst the primitive Christians, who wore the same flesh and blood with us, preserved in their hearts the most sincere affection and charity for their enemies, and sought no other way to be revenged of them than by praying for them, and overcoming evil with good. They suffered the loss of every thing that was dear to human nature with patience, and endured the sharpest trials and the most barbarous cruelties with the meekness of lambs and the simplicity of doves. Far from retaliating, far from regarding their persecutors as objects of their anger and aversion, they looked upon them as the instruments of divine justice, and bore the injuries done them as coming from the hand of God, and designed for their spiritual good. When they were imprisoned, scourged, stoned, and put to death, they prayed for their enemies, they rejoiced that they were deemed worthy to suffer ignominy for the name of Jesus, and they laid down their lives without showing the least resentment. Where shall we find such examples of charity and moderation now-a-days? How often, alas! do modern Christians, for want of observing the maxims of the Gospel, turn enemies to their own repose, and traitors to their conscience! How often do they provoke the divine vengeance against themselves, and unchristianly, as well as imprudently, revenge upon their own souls the real or imaginary injuries done to their persons! If they do not imbrue their hands in the blood of those whom they suppose to be their enemies, and that for fear of falling victims to the justice of the civil laws, how often do they wish for their death, and murder them with their hearts, though not with their hands, and stab their reputation with their envenomed tongues! They grieve at their prosperity, rejoice at their adversity, inveigh against them with bitterness, and take pleasure at hearing them reviled, traduced, and detracted by others; they cannot endure their presence, nor bear to hear a favorable word said of them; they obstinately reject all terms of reconciliation, and refuse to return even an answer or a salute. Others, indeed, more moderate, will say that they forgive those whom they call their enemies, that they bear them no ill-will and wish them no harm, but never desire to see their face, or sit in their company. Surely, my brethren, it cannot be reasonably supposed that this is sufficient to comply with the great law of charity, and discharge the obligation of fraternal love, which our Divine Legislator commands us to bear unto all those who are created after His image, redeemed by the blood of Jesus, and destined to inherit His kingdom. Would we be satisfied to be

forgiven ourselves by God on these terms only, so as never to be admitted into His divine presence, nor to see His blessed face? To bear no ill-will, or wish no harm to our neighbor, what is this more than what we do to the common beasts? The law of God requires a more sublime perfection and sanctity from us. *If thy enemy be hungry, says St. Paul, give him to eat; if he thirst, give him to drink; for, doing this, thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head* (Rom. xii. 20), that is, according to the interpretation of St. Ambrose, thou wilt mitigate his anger and make him your friend. The effects of your charity will rekindle his that was dead, as a burning coal lights another that was quenched. By this condescension you will contribute to save his soul, and extricate him from the jaws of hell. This is charity; this is loving our neighbor in God and for God; this, in short, is loving God in our neighbor, and it is in this manner we are to love our enemies and gain over those that hate us. Look down upon us, we beseech Thee, O Blessed Jesus, from the throne of Thy bliss with the eyes of pity, and grant us, by the merits of Thy passion and death, that spirit of charity with which Thou didst cry out from the cross for Thy most cruel enemies, saying: *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.* Verify in our hearts what we so often repeat with our tongues, saying: *Father, forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.* Fill our hearts with such abundant charity as may entitle our souls to the joys of heaven, where we hope to see and enjoy Thee for a never-ending eternity. Which is the blessing, my brethren, I sincerely wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFT. PENTECOST.

ON THE SIN OF COVETOUSNESS AND INJUSTICE, AND THE OBLIGATION OF MAKING RESTITUTION.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. Explanation of the Gospel.
- II. Just dues must be paid.
- III. We must not covet our neighbor's goods.
- IV. An appeal for justice.

Reddite quæ sunt Cæsaris Cæsari, et quæ sunt Dei Deo.—*St. Matt. c. xxii. v. 21.*
Render to Cesar the things that are Cesar's, and to God the things that are God's.

St. Matt. c. xxii. v. 21.

THIS Sunday's Gospel informs us that the Pharisees, in concert with the Herodians, endeavored to ensnare the innocence of our Blessed Saviour, by proposing a question to Him which they imagined He could not answer without either forfeiting His reputation and credit among the people, or drawing on Himself the frowns and indignation of the Roman government, to which Judea was then become tributary. They asked Him: *Was it lawful to pay tribute to Cesar, or not?* If He replied that tribute ought to be paid him, they expected that such an answer would render Christ odious in the eyes of the Jews, who looked upon the Romans as usurpers of their country, and believed themselves to be exempted from paying tribute to any foreign prince whatsoever, as they were the chosen people of God. If Christ answered that tribute should not be paid, the Pharisees were in hopes that He would thereby incur the displeasure of the Roman governor, and of course be treated as an enemy to Cesar. But the Son of God, knowing their secret thoughts and intentions, defeated their malicious designs, and made them shortly retire with shame and confusion. Having called on them to produce a piece of the current coin of the country, He asked them whose image or inscription was stamped on it. They replying that Cesar's image was stamped on it, our Divine Redeemer concluded and said: *Render to Cesar what belongs to Cesar, and to God what belongs to God.* By this wise answer He confounded the malice of enemies, and gently upbraided them with their hypocrisy, in showing so much apparent zeal for what might procure them the esteem

and applause of men, whilst they neglected paying to Almighty God the honor and glory due to His divine majesty, from every one on whom He has stamped His image and likeness. Different mystical interpretations are given to these words of our Lord ; but at present I shall confine myself to the literal and obvious sense, and endeavor to lay before you some important instructions concerning the virtue of justice, and the indispensable obligation of making restitution, which arises from a violation of it. Permit me then, my brethren, to impress this divine oracle deeply on your minds : *Render to Cesar what belongs to Cesar*. Pay your just debts ; give all men their due ; do not covet your neighbor's goods ; restore his property, which you have either unjustly acquired or which you unjustly retain ; for without restitution, at least in will or desire, when it is otherwise impossible, there can be no forgiveness, no salvation. Behold the entire plan of the following discourse, and the subject of your favorable attention. Let us previously implore the divine assistance, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin. *Ave Maria*.

Covetousness, says St. Paul, *is the root of all evils*, and the source of numberless crimes. Men who set their hearts and affections too much upon money *fall into temptation, and into the snare of the devil, and into many unprofitable and hurtful desires, which drown them to destruction and perdition, and cause them to err from the faith, and entangle them in many sorrows*—1 Tim. vi. 9, 10. Other vices usually stare the sinner in the face, and are so glaring and palpable, that when he falls into them he soon becomes sensible of his error, and often repents : but covetousness disguises itself under the mask of prudence and necessity. Those who are slaves to this dangerous vice, are so strangely biased and blinded, that they are not sensible of it themselves. What covetous man is there that believes he is covetous ? Nothing is more common in the world than to see those who set their hearts and affections upon riches applauding themselves as wise, frugal, and prudent men, whilst they are considered by others as mere misers, who have not the heart to use what they have, and are always poor and in want of more ; for the more the avaricious man has the more he desires. All other passions are somewhat satisfied, at least for a time, but covetousness is insatiable, it is never contented. Like the leech mentioned by Solomon (Prov. xxx.), it thirsts still after more, and is ever restless and disquieted between the desire of getting and the fear of losing. Riches to a good Christian are like his clothes, he

pnts them off without pain ; but to a covetous man they are like his skin. If he parts with them, it is with great reluctance and exquisite torment. A good Christian, like holy Job, feels the loss when deprived of them, and resigns himself to the will of Heaven, blessing God and saying : *The Lord gave, and the Lord taketh away ; blessed be the name of the Lord.* But the covetous man, when he meets with any loss, murmurs, repines, complains, and becomes a prey to impatience and despair. His mind is continually occupied, even in time of his religious duties, with the thoughts of accumulating worldly treasures. He neglects his spiritual concerns when they interfere with his temporal interest. He is unfeeling, unmerciful, and hard-hearted to the poor. He is backward in paying his servants' wages, in giving tradesmen and laborers their hire, and in discharging his other just and lawful debts. In short, his attachment to the perishable goods and possessions of this transitory life is so inordinate, that he places his happiness therein, and he loves money to such a degree, that to acquire it he has recourse to unlawful means, and to all kinds of frauds and palliated usuries, especially when he can do it with impunity, or without being detected. It is in a man of this character that the following words of Ecclesiasticus, x. 9, are verified in a particular manner : *There is not a more wicked thing than a covetous man, for such a person setteth even his own soul to sale.* Mammon is his god and his darling idol ; for the love of it he turns his back upon his Creator, neglects his religious duties, breaks all the commandments, tramples upon the divine law, oppresses the poor, is guilty of lies and perjuries, bribery and corruption, sacrilege and treachery, and stops at no fraud, deceit, extortion, or injustice, provided he may but fill his coffers. The malignity of this vice appears clearly in Achab, Heliodorus, the rich glutton mentioned in the Gospel ; Ananias and Sapphira, and unhappy Judas, who sold and betrayed the Son of God Himself for the love of money.

It would be an endless task to enumerate all the evils that spring from this dreadful vice, or to point out the various species of injustice, and the many sinful traffics, unlawful contracts, artifices, and crafty ways, which covetous men have invented and contrived for the purpose of circumventing and defrauding others, there being scarce any state or profession of life, scarce any occupation or branch of trade, but is subject to frauds and impositions. All the different ways of committing injustice are comprehended under this great prohibition : *Thou shalt not steal.* By stealing, or by theft in general is understood an unjust

taking away, damaging, or retaining what belongs to another against his will, by secret fraud, cheating, or imposition. The malice of this crime is so glaring and so manifest, that the greatest profligates are not ignorant of it, even amidst the thickest darkness of infidelity. In the law of nature, before any written law was given, mankind knew full well that it was unlawful to rob or steal, as appears plainly from Genesis, chapters xxxi. and xlv., wherein mention is made of the theft of Rachel and of the brothers of Joseph. When the Lord afterward gave the Ten Commandments to Moses, He expressly forbid theft and all unjust actions in the Seventh Commandment, and in the Tenth Commandment He forbid all unjust desires of what belongs to our neighbor; He also decreed severe punishments against the transgressors of this law, as we read in c. xxii. of Exodus. It is related in the second Book of Kings (c. xii.) that when the Prophet Nathan told King David that a rich man had forcibly taken away a sheep from a poor man, the king pronounced sentence of death against the rich man. The seventh chapter of the Book of Josue relates also that the Lord permitted three thousand of the Israelites to be conquered by a small number of their enemies, in punishment of the theft of Achan, and that the wrath of Heaven was not appeased until Josue ordered all that Achan possessed to be consumed by flames, and Achan himself to be stoned to death by all the people, amongst whom there was neither man, woman, nor child but cast a stone at him in detestation of his crime. The second Book of Machabees, iii. and ix., affords us likewise two dreadful instances hereof in the person of King Antiochus and Heliodorus; the former of whom, by a just judgment of God, was eaten up by worms and cut off the face of the earth in the midst of his sins, and the latter was scourged almost to death by two angels from Heaven, for having attempted to rob the Temple of Jerusalem. Hence it is evident that theft which is committed by hidden fraud, and rapine or robbery, which is committed by open violence, are of their own nature grievous sins, manifest breaches of justice and charity, subversive of the public good, prohibited by the laws of nations, a direct violation of the positive law of God, and contrary to the very first principle of the law of nature, which forbids us *to do unto others what we would not have others to do to ourselves*. For this reason, St. Paul condemns covetousness as a species of idolatry, and ranks theft and robbery, the sad offsprings of it, in the black list of the mortal sins, which exclude from the kingdom of Heaven. *Neither thieves, nor*

the covetous, nor drunkards, nor extortioners, shall possess the kingdom of God, says the great Apostle (1 Cor. vi.), and in his first Epistle to the Thessalonians (iv. 6), he cautions every man not to overreach, deceive, or circumvent his neighbor, *because the Lord is a revenger of all those things*. The most obvious frauds which you are to be cautioned against in particular, are those which occur in daily practice amongst traders, and which are committed in buying and selling, such as using false measures and light weights ; cheating in number and reckoning ; in the price, substance, quantity or quality of goods ; putting off false money, buying and receiving stolen goods ; selling defective, damaged and adulterated goods for sound and salable ; buying for others and charging more for an article than it really cost, with a view of pocketing the overplus in a clandestine manner ; entering into private compacts and combinations to raise goods above their real value, or to lower them under their real value by the same fraudulent means ; taking advantage of the ignorance, necessity, or distress of a buyer or seller, and selling goods for more than they are worth, and considerably above the common market rates, or buying them under the lowest degree of the just price, and considerably beneath the common value. This desire of selling above the value and buying under the value is common to several, who, as St. Thomas of Aquin says, are walking in the broad way of sin and perdition ; they imagine they may buy goods as cheap as ever they can, and sell as high as ever they can ; but they are greatly mistaken, for justice requires an equality between the price and the goods that are bought or sold, and for this reason the virtue of justice is usually represented by a pair of scales, which equalizes things that are exchanged one for another. You will, perhaps, ask me, Is it not reasonable that a trader should get a livelihood and make an advantage by his trade ? It is certainly reasonable, but this advantage ought to be regulated by the principles of justice ; for if it be not consistent with them, he is bound to forego all such interests, rather than enrich himself by fraud, or let his bread be the fruit of injustice. He should remember, that *it is better to have a little with the fear of God, than to possess great and insatiable treasures*, as the wise man says—Proverbs, xv.

The Scripture is particularly severe against usurers, extortioners, and monopolists, who prey upon the very vitals of the poor by their extortions, and who, by engrossing to themselves the necessities of life cause an artificial scarcity, and raise the markets beyond the reach of the

common people. It denounces a dreadful woe against those who defraud poor servants and workmen of the whole or of a part of their wages, and says that the tears of the widow and the orphan whom they oppress and crush by their unjust practices, and the sighs and complaints of poor laborers and other indigent and helpless objects whose faces they grind, *cry aloud to Heaven for vengeance against them*. The Scripture likewise inveighs in the strongest terms against the traders and dealers who make use of false weights and false measures. *Woe be to him*, says the Prophet Habacuc, ii., *who heaps together, and multiplies what is not his own*; and Prov. xi. and xx: *A deceitful balance is an abomination before the Lord; diverse weights and diverse measures are an abomination before the Lord*; and again (Deuteron. xxv. 13, 16): *Thou shalt not have diverse weights in thy bag, a greater and a less; neither shall there be in thy house a greater bushel and a less, for the Lord thy God abhorreth him that doth these things, and he hateth all injustice*.

This plainly shows how criminal a practice it is to accumulate by degrees, or by little and little, any considerable portion of other men's property, or to form the will and intention of gathering together a large quantity or sum by several petty thefts and small injustices, repeatedly committed against the same person, or against the community at large. Every petty theft thus committed contracts the guilt of mortal sin, because it proceeds from a will tending to a considerable object, and the will of stealing a considerable quantity is a mortal sin, although the matter stolen with such an intention should happen to be only small in itself.

But what judgment is to be formed of debtors who deny and refuse to pay their lawful debts? It is plain that they are guilty of a manifest breach of justice, especially when they contract debts which they intend never to pay, or when they defer the payment too long, to the great prejudice of their creditors, or involve their creditors in tedious and vexatious law-suits, in order to weary them with unnecessary expenses, and force them to quit their just pretensions, or to compound at an under-rate, for fear of greater inconveniences.

As for domestic frauds, which are committed by married women, children, and servants, it is not to be doubted but they fall under the general prohibition of theft. The Holy Scripture says (Prov. xxviii. 24), *that a child who steals from his father or from his mother, and saith this is no sin, is a partner of a murderer*. Parents are likewise

guilty of injustice when they neglect to provide for their family, and squander in extravagances what is necessary for the support of their children, or rob one child of his birthright in order to enrich and exalt another. In fine, those who are charged and intrusted with the management of other people's affairs, or who are in any public office, and do not discharge their respective duties and functions faithfully, incur the guilt of injustice, besides a grievous breach of trust. To inspire you with the greater abhorrence and detestation of these evils, permit me to add a few words on the nature and indispensable obligation of restitution, which arises from a violation of justice ; it is what I promised to lay before you in the second point.

Restitution is an act of commutative justice, whereby a thing is restored to its right owner either in kind or in itself, if it be still extant, or if it be embezzled, consumed, or destroyed, an equivalent in value ; for justice requires an equality between what is taken away and what is restored in its place, with an exact proportion between the loss and damage unjustly caused, and the reparation that is made. The very first principle of the law of nature inculcates this important duty, as it dictates that we should do to others as we ourselves would wish to be done by, and consequently that we ought to give every one his own, that we ought to pay our lawful debts, and make a just compensation for any injury we have done. As there are various ways of committing injustice and injuring others, so, in like manner, there are various sources from whence the obligation of restitution arises. Generally speaking, there arises an obligation of restitution from a breach of each of the commandments, which forbids us injure our neighbor in his person, in his goods, his honor, his character and reputation. The Seventh Commandment, which forbids theft, rapine, and every other species of injustice, commands and obliges us to be just in our dealings and transactions, to discharge the debts we have contracted, to repair the damages we have occasioned, and not to retain another man's property against his will, or without his knowledge and free consent, it being equally injurious to retain the property of another unjustly and to take it away unjustly. This made St. Augustine say (l. 50, hom. 9), that they who find their neighbor's goods, and conceal and retain them, are guilty of a breach of God's commandment which forbids theft. *What thou hast found, and not restored, thou hast stolen it*, says the holy doctor. The precept of restitution is expressly mentioned in several parts of the Old Testament (c. xxi. and xxii. of Exodus, c. vi. of Leviticus, and

c. xxxiii. of Ezechiel,) where the Almighty says : *If any thing be taken away by stealth, the damages shall be restored to the owner ; and if any man hurt another man's field or vineyard, and put his cattle to feed on his neighbor's property, he shall restore according to the estimation of the damage.*

And really, my brethren, it was not only expedient but necessary that the Lord should thus establish the law of restitution, in order to protect honest and industrious men, and secure each individual in the peaceable possession of the external goods of fortune with which His Divine Providence is pleased to bless him. What security or protection would there be, if knavish and ill-designing men were exempted from the burden of restitution, and could as easily elude the divine law and escape the justice of God, as they elude the civil law and escape human justice? Would it not be a strong temptation to them to enrich themselves with the spoils of their neighbors, whenever they could do it without being discovered? Would it not be a means of making the world become a den of thieves? If, in the present system, notwithstanding the curb of restitution, we hear of so many criminal traffics, so many frauds and circumventions, so many unlawful profits, unjust combinations and crafty stratagems, invented and contrived for the purpose of cheating and wronging the simple and unwary, we may easily judge to what lengths human depravity would drive covetous and avaricious men, if they were under no obligation of making restitution.

It is only on this condition that the Lord promises forgiveness to repenting sinners who have been guilty of sins of injustice. In order to obtain pardon, they and all their accomplices who have concurred and co-operated with them, either directly or indirectly, must, in the first place, satisfy God by humiliation and penance for having transgressed His holy law ; they must likewise satisfy their neighbor by restoring his property, and by compensating to the utmost of their power the loss which he sustained through their fault. For this reason it has always been the constant practice of the Church to refuse absolution and the holy sacraments of reconciliation to thieves, robbers, usurers, extortioners, unjust dealers, receivers, accomplices, and usurpers of other men's goods, unless they sincerely renounce their detestable practices, and make restitution for their past injustices. No power on earth can dispense with them in this duty, or discharge them in conscience from this burden, except the injured person relaxes the obligation, or the right owner of the goods which have been unjustly acquired,

or which are unjustly retained, gives his free consent. A consent given by those who have it not in their power to give up their right, as is the case of children under age, is not sufficient; neither is the consent sufficient which is extorted by force or fear, such as that of the ten men who gave up all their treasures to Ismahel, in order to save their lives, as we read in Jerem. xli. 8. Such a consent, I say, is not sufficient, because it is not free and voluntary, but compulsory, like unto that which a street robber or highway man forces from those whose pockets he empties against their will. Hence it follows that those who take an advantage of the necessities and distresses of the poor, and extort their consent to pay unlawful interest or exorbitant prices, and likewise those who fail or break designedly to defraud their creditors, and force them to enter into an unfair composition, are not excused in the sight of God from the obligation of making restitution and paying their lawful debts, because the consent that is given in similar cases is not free. Nothing but a real impossibility, or an absolute incapacity, can discharge them from the burden of restitution, and even in this case it is necessary for them to be firmly resolved to acquit themselves of this duty if ever in their power, and to satisfy for the injury and injustice done to others, as far as they are able. Unless they be in this disposition of heart and mind, they cannot be supposed to be true Gospel penitents, or to have a real regret for their past sins; they do not repent in reality, says St. Augustine, but only pretend to repent. *Non agitur, sed fingitur pœnitentia*; their conversion is but a mere phantom, though outwardly attended with the most favorable appearances; for, as the aforesaid holy doctor observes in his fifty-fourth epistle to Macedonius, where injustice is the case no forgiveness is to be had from God, and no benefit is to be received from the healing sacrament of penance without restitution, or the will and intention of it, when it is otherwise impracticable. Let me then, my brethren, re-echo these words of Jesus Christ in your ears, and impress them deeply on your minds: *Render unto Cesar what belongs to Cesar*, and that without any considerable delay; for the longer restitution is deferred the more the sin of injustice increases, on account of the greater loss that the proprietor suffers in the interim for want of his property, and the greater length of time that the unjust possessor continues in the will and intention of wronging his neighbor. Let no false pretext, blind partiality, or mistaken regard for your children, friends, or relations, induce you to risk your salvation by putting off this duty to the end of your life, and transmitting to your heirs and

successors a burden, which, perhaps, they never will discharge, although the obligation of restitution descends and devolves along with the ill-gotten property to those who inherit it, when they know that it was unjustly acquired and unjustly bequeathed. Is it not better, my brethren, to leave your children and friends a little, with the fear of God, than to expose them to the danger of losing their souls by leaving them an ill-acquired property, which they cannot keep without entailing damnation on themselves? In fine, is it not more eligible to live contented with what you can acquire by honest industry, be it ever so little, than to forfeit a happy eternity for the sake of the perishable goods of this transitory life, which are only valuable so far as they are conducive to eternal salvation? What, alas! will it avail a man to possess all the pearls of India, all the diamonds in the sea, all the gold mines of Peru, and all the treasures of the universe, if in the end he loses his immortal soul? Is it not an undoubted truth that riches are attended with many dangers, and commonly made instrumental to pride, vanity, luxury, and a multiplicity of other sins? There are, indeed, rich men to be found who make good use of their riches to God's honor and the good of their neighbor; but they are so generally abused and made subservient to vice, that the Gospel denounces a dreadful *woe to the rich* (Luke, vi. 24), and assures us, *that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of Heaven*—Matt. xix. 24. The poor man, whose time and thoughts are constantly employed and taken up with his toil and daily labor, stands fairer for a happy eternity hereafter than he whose fortune enables him to gratify his passions, and wanton in all the pleasures and delights of nature. Hence the poverty and sores of a miserable Lazarus, supported with patience, conveyed him to the bosom of Abraham in Paradise, whilst the wealth and treasures of the rich glutton, squandered in riot and feasting sumptuously, plunged him into hell for all eternity.

Beware then, my brethren, of the dangerous sin of covetousness and of its wicked offspring, injustice. Practice the salutary advice of the great Augustine: *Redde pecuniam, perde pecuniam, ne perdas animam*; restore that money which does not belong to you, and, if it be necessary, even lose that money which does not belong to you, that you may not lose your soul which belongs to God, and which was redeemed with the precious blood of His beloved Son. If, notwithstanding all your industry, you are not as rich as some of your neighbors, you are

not to envy them, but to be resigned to the blessed will of Divine Providence, which orders all things for the better ; if you do not make as rapid a fortune as they do, you should comfort yourselves with the pleasing reflection, that you renounce a short perishable gain for conscience sake and for the love of your God, who has promised to reward the just and faithful servant hereafter with incorruptible riches and immortal glory in the kingdom of Heaven. O Father of Mercies and Giver of all good gifts, renew among Thy people that spirit of justice and equity which is the true characteristic of Christianity ; preserve us from a covetous worldly spirit which has no bounds ; give us grace to moderate the desires of our hearts, and to live soberly, justly, and piously in this world, that the transitory goods of this life may never make us forget the permanent and everlasting riches of Thy glory, which Thou hast prepared in the kingdom of Heaven, for those who love and serve Thee faithfully here on earth. Which I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFT. PENTECOST.

ON DEATH:

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. The certainty of death, but the uncertainty of the time.
- II. Death of the just man.
- III. Death of the sinner.
- IV. The dangers of a death-bed repentance.

Domine, filia mea modò defuncta est, sed veni, impone manum tuam super eam et vivet.—St. Matt. c. ix. v. 18.

Lord, my daughter is even now dead ; but come, lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live.—St. Matt. c. ix. v. 18.

THE Holy Scripture frequently exhibits the weakness and misery of mankind, under various types and figures, and the Church zealously exhorts us to reflect on those emblems, as so many motives to awaken our faith and put a stop to our follies. In this day's Gospel we read two miracles wrought by our Blessed Saviour, one in favor of a woman who for twelve years had been troubled with an inveterate distemper, and was cured in an instant by touching the hem of His garment ; the

other in favor of the daughter of a ruler of the synagogue, who told Him that his daughter was dead. That this will be the end of every one of us in a few years, is a truth too manifest for a proof. Ages and generations glide away with all their noise and splendor, and roll down the stream of time into the immense ocean and abyss of eternity. Our days pass over without interruption, and the fleeting moments constantly fly from us never more to return. Each instant we approach our last end, and every step we take brings us nearer to the grave. The extent of our existence in this world is but a span, and the frame of our body is so slenderly put together, that it is only one degree from putrefaction. Our sentence is already pronounced, and the execution of it is only deferred for a short time, perhaps much shorter than we imagine. The sentence is general. The sinner and the saint, the rich and the poor must all die, and there is no privilege or distinction to shade them from the fatal stroke. We are all convinced of this, and yet where is the preparation? If, indeed, by forgetting death, we could make death forget us, there might be some excuse for our negligence; but as we know by experience that it steals upon us unforeseen, and that thousands are snatched away like the dying worldling mentioned in St. Luke, xx., at the very time they flatter themselves with the expectation of many years enjoyment of their worldly goods and pleasures, we should frequently make death the subject of our serious consideration, in order to prevent the horrors of an unhappy death, and dispose our souls efficaciously for a happy removal from this vale of tears. I own there is nothing more melancholy, or more shocking to nature, than the consideration of being obnoxious to such a change. However, as death is inevitable, and as its consequences are eternal and irreparable, what is it we should consider, if it be not a matter of such importance, on which our eternal happiness or misery depends? Must we not be devoid of reason and religion, if we do not think seriously of dying happily, and preparing ourselves with the utmost diligence to sanctify our last moments by a virtuous life? As we came into the world for nothing else but to provide for a happy eternity, by loving and serving the Lord our God, should we not conclude that we came into the world for nothing else but to learn to die well; a good and happy death being the way to a happy eternity? Seneca himself says, that true philosophy consists in a frequent consideration of death; and St. Augustine tells us, that as sin was the cause of death, so in like manner death is a remedy against sin. *If in all our works we reflected seriously on our last end,* as the wise man

recommends (Eccles. vii.) if we made this the rule and standard of our actions, and considered attentively that the very moment the breath leaves the body there follows a judgment which decides our misery or happiness for all eternity, *we would never sin*, nor die miserably, as death in this case would be a sovereign preservative from sin and a powerful incentive to virtue. Permit me, then, to engage your attention with the thoughts of death, and to point out the salutary effects that a frequent and serious consideration of it is productive of. The just man, who is always mindful of death, stands prepared for the awful moment, meets it with confidence and smiles on its approach. The dying worldling, on the contrary, who lives as if he was never to die, is filled with anguish, terrors, apprehensions, and remorse. The consolations and advantages of the one; the fears, alarms, and perplexities of the other. Behold the entire subject of the following discourse. Let us, as usual, implore the divine aid through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin. *Ave Maria.*

Nothing is more certain than that we must all die, though nothing is more uncertain than the hour and manner of our death, and the tenor of the sentence we shall then meet with. The day will infallibly come, and God only can tell how soon, when we shall never more see the night. And the night will come when we shall never more see the ensuing morning. What has become of all the famous heroes of antiquity, and of all the mighty monarchs and celebrated beauties, who, heretofore, made such a noise and figure on the theatre of the world? Their dust lies blended with the common earth, and few or none now think of them, or even know that they were ever in being. No sooner did they breathe their last breath than they became pale, stiff, loathsome, hideous, and putrid. Scarce one of their dearest friends could endure to watch them a single night, and their nearest relations were the first to turn their dead bodies out of doors, and to lay them deep under ground, lest they should infect the air. All the esteem and applause which they acquired in the world was not able to procure them a moment's satisfaction in the grave, where they found no other inheritance, no other ornaments or diet than indigence, worms, and infection. Just so will it be with us in a few years. We shall be wrapped up in a shroud, nailed up in a narrow coffin, carried to the grave, confined to five or six feet of earth, and laid under a cold stone, to be eaten up by worms, to be reduced to a handful of dust and ashes, to be trampled upon by future generations, and to be no more thought of than if we never had existed. We are all hastening

to that critical period as fast as the wings of time can carry us, and when we have once arrived at it, and set our foot within the gates of eternity, there is no coming back. That very instant the misery or felicity of man is decided for ever and ever ; and if it be a miserable eternity into which he has stepped, there is no remedy, no redemption, This is what renders death so awful. If we die well, our happiness is secured for the whole length of eternity ; if we die ill, we shall be miserable and unhappy without end, as long as God will be God. It is in this light we should consider death as connected with our eternal happiness or misery ; and since this is a matter of infinite consequence, it is our interest as well as our duty to think frequently and seriously of it, and to make the thoughts of it the rule of our conduct. St. Jerome remarks, that a frequent consideration of death is a powerful means to wean our affections from the world, and to make us seek that real and permanent happiness above, which is not to be found here below on earth. Nothing exposes more clearly to our view the instability and vanity of all sublunary things ; nothing is more capable of pulling down the pride of man, and keeping him within the bounds of Christian humility. It contributes very much to check the violence of his passions and to curb his vicious inclinations. It sets him above the power of the delusive charms of the world, and disengages his heart from all immoderate attachments to its perishable riches, empty pleasures and transitory enjoyments. In short, it animates him to the practice of those duties which God commands and religion prescribes.

The very pagans themselves were taught by the light of nature, the utility and good effects of thinking frequently of their mortality, and contracting a kind of familiarity with death. Profane history informs us, that the remembrance of death was one of the principal circumstances of their most solemn pomps, and that they deemed it a religious duty to preserve the ashes of their ancestors in urns, in order to be constantly reminded thereby that they were mortal men. The Romans in their triumphs, the Grecians in the coronation of their emperors, and the Egyptians in their public feasts, made use of certain striking emblems of human mortality, lest the honors and dignities to which they were exalted, and the banquets to which their guests were invited should make them forget that they were mortal men, or cause them to fall into any criminal excesses. It is related also of some Christian emperors and princes, that for the same purpose they had a representation of Death placed constantly in their palaces, before their eyes, in the midst of their

most valuable furniture, and that they ordered their pages to greet them every day with this salutation: *Memento mori—Remember you are to die.* It is still usual at the coronation of every new Pope to burn a little stubble or flax to ashes in his presence, one of the attendants saying at the same time: *Thus, Holy Father, the glory of the world passes away;* in order to remind him that the Papal dignity does not exempt him from being tributary to death. In like manner in the sacred ceremonies of Ash Wednesday, the Church is accustomed to remind her children of their mortality, in the memorable words which the Almighty made use of when He pronounced sentence of death against our first parents, after their fall from the happy state of their original innocence: *Remember, man, thou art but dust, and unto dust thou shalt return.* O that we made it our study to turn this great truth frequently in our thoughts! What happy fruits would it be productive of! Did we but lay out even one day in the month, as spiritual writers earnestly recommend, for meditating seriously on death, and for working ourselves into the dispositions that we would willingly die in and appear before the tribunal of the Sovereign Judge, what conversions, what a change and reformation would we behold in the morals and conduct of Christians! But, alas! they seldom think of death until death comes to seize on them, and *then men generally die as they live*, as St. Augustine observes.

Happy they who are ever watching and continually preparing for this hour by a virtuous life, this being the only security against a sudden and unprovided death! Happy the man who lives every day as if it were to be his last; *it shall be well with him at the last hour, and he shall be blessed in his death.* Unhappy on the other hand are they, who defer their preparation to their death-bed, and put the issue of a never-ending eternity upon the poor chance of a late repentance, when the dullness and stupidity caused by their last illness, scarce allow of any serious application of their thoughts to the most important of all their concerns! Unhappy the dying worldling who, bent only on enjoying the comforts and pleasures of this life, lives with little or no sense of God and of eternity! Is it to be admired that the approaches of death should be so terrible to him, and that he should be strangely apprehensive of its coming? O what a wide difference is there between his death and the death of the just man, who passes from time to eternity crowned with merit and surrounded with virtue! *The death of the sinner*, who having spent his life in the pursuit of worldly vanities, has no other offerings at the last hour to present to his angry Judge than

what he has extracted from his crimes and iniquities, is indeed *a most dreadful evil*, as the Royal Prophet says—Psal. xxiii. His mirth and jollities are then come to their fatal period, and his eyes are taking an everlasting farewell of all the fond objects of his passions. This horrible divorce and separation make him shudder in the most bitter anguish and grief, whilst he beholds himself violently torn from all he possesses and enjoys, even from his very body which he loved too well. The pagan philosopher considered this only, when he defined death *the King of Terrors, and of all terrible things that which is the most dreadful*. But what is more alarming than this separation is, that all the former notions of the dying worldling are overturned in this awful moment; an entire new scene is opened to him, and he begins to see things in a different point of view from what he did before. His conscience is a confused chaos; a thousand perplexing thoughts disturb him; his habits of spiritual sloth grow stronger than ever; he opens his eyes, and sees that riches and honors, which he so eagerly pursued, were mere illusions, and that his former pleasures were no better than dreams and shadows, which passed in a moment, and left but a cruel sting behind them that he is not able to stifle. He now beholds the treacherous world forsaking him in the day of his distress, and the prospect of the abyss of eternal misery, which discloses itself by degrees, fills his mind with alarms and terrors that no tongue can express. If he dies insensible, as often happens to those who forget God in their health, his situation is the more desperate and deplorable, because the instant that his miserable soul leaves his body in the state of mortal sin unrepented, she is irretrievably lost and sentenced to burn in unquenchable flames. She is abandoned by God and His angels, and given over a prey to merciless devils, who insulting her may be supposed to cry out: Let men on earth crown the carcass of this sinner with pompous monuments, epitaphs, elegies, and panegyrics; his soul is our victim now, as his body will also be after the general judgment.

All these objects, which appear so frightful to the dying worldling at his last hour, are real motives of joy and springs of spiritual consolation to the just man at the approach of death; for if he reflects on the world, which he is going to forsake, he considers it as a tempestuous sea, filled with rocks and quicksands; he looks on it as a place of banishment and a vale of misery, where man is engaged in a continual warfare, surrounded by a thousand enemies, constantly exposed to danger, and every moment liable to perish. Instead of being deceived like the sinful

worldling, by false appearances, he beholds the tempting allurements, fawning pleasures and transitory riches of the world as nothing else but *mere vanity and affliction of spirit*, as Solomon declared from the throne. He regards its enjoyments as insignificant trifles, painted toys, and empty bubbles, which their admirers no sooner offer to lay hold of than they dissolve into air. *They have slept out their sleep*, says the Royal Prophet, *and when they awoke they found nothing in their hands of all those things which in their dream they seemed to possess*. This is a true description of the vanity of worldly enjoyments, which only bring with them a momentary satisfaction, and are quickly followed by perplexing cares, apprehensions, and remorse. The just man being well convinced of this truth, wishes to be rescued from the dangerous snares and embarrassments of this mortal life; he longs, like St. Paul, to be disengaged from the prison of the flesh, and desires in the secret of his heart the disunion of his soul and body, as the only way to a real and lasting happiness. He considers with great tranquillity and composure of mind, the passage which he is going to make out of the world, as a happy deliverance from his pilgrimage. He looks upon himself here on earth as an exile, solicitous to return to his native country, as a traveler hastening to the end of his journey, as a captive impatient to be freed from his chains, and to be released from his bondage. Blessed with these Christian sentiments, the hour of death is welcome to him, and consummates all his wishes. He forsakes without regret what he *possessed in the world, as if he did not possess it, and what he made use of, as if he did not use it*, according to the expression of the Apostle.

Death, on the contrary, appears terrible to the dying worldling. The strong and criminal friendship which he contracted with the world makes him unwilling to part it; for, as St. Augustine observes, a person does not part without regret what he sets his heart upon. Dazzled with the glittering show of the vanities of this life, he places it in all his felicity, and if it depended upon him, his entire hopes and expectations would be centered on this side of the grave. Is it then to be admired, that when death shall force and violently tear him away from the enjoyment of these imaginary pleasures, his heart should be agitated with strange convulsions, and that the bitterness of his soul should be equal to the avarice of his mind? Is it to be wondered at, that he should cry out with the impious king mentioned in Holy Writ: *Is it thus, cruel death, that you make so bitter a separation?* Is it thus that you rob me of what I esteemed most valuable and charming in life? O what

anguish, what confusion, what dreadful temptations of despair will then arise ! Whatever way the dying worldling turns himself to seek for ease or comfort, he can find none. Before his eyes he beholds an innumerable multitude of horrid oaths, curses, blasphemies, criminal excesses, and other grievous sins, which stare him in the face with all their deformity. If he looks back into his past life, he finds the good works he has done too inconsiderable when balanced with his multiplied crimes. The remembrance of the graces, invitations and calls of heaven, which he resisted ; the many opportunities of storing up eternal treasures, which he neglected ; the talents and gracious gifts of God, which he misemployed ; the precious time that he squandered away, the holy sacraments which he abused, set before his eyes such a dismal scene of woe, distress, and confusion, that he now experiences the truth of these words of the Royal Prophet (Ps. cxiv. 3): *The sorrows of death have compassed me, and the perils of hell have found me.* His very prayers fly in his face, and upbraid him with sloth and negligence. The sight of every thing about him, his wife, his children, his friends, his worldly substance, which he loved more than his God, serve now but to increase his anguish, and what still adds misery to misery, the pains and agonies of his sickness gave him little or no leisure or ability to apply himself seriously to the great work of a perfect conversion to God. But the just man will have nothing of this to fear at the hour of his death, because he never fixed his happiness on worldly trifles, but, raising his heart to God, was always faithful to His divine law, and from thence proceeds another motive of consolation ; for there is no earthly pleasure comparable to the peace and serenity of a virtuous Christian standing on the verge of life, and ready to meet death with the testimony of a good conscience, and the well-grounded hopes of *entering into the joys of his Lord.* It is in this last scene that he is enlivened and consoled, by the strong faith and confidence he has in the goodness and mercies of his Heavenly Father, and in the infinite merits of Jesus Christ his Redeemer. The assurance of a well-spent life, the price and merit of those virtues which his humility suppressed and concealed from the eyes of men ; the multitude of good works which triumphantly surround him ; the perfect conformity to the will of God, and other happy dispositions with which he closes his eyes and yields up his soul into his Creator's hands, make him cheerfully take his leave of this world, and welcome the happy hour that is to put an end to his labors and unite him to his God. O what satisfaction is it to him, to

see himself drawing nigh the gates of heavenly Jerusalem, and upon the point of being admitted into the eternal mansions of glory, and associated to the blessed choirs of angels and saints ! Having before him this bright prospect, he considers the pangs of death and the pains of his dissolution to be nothing else but the breaking down of that partition which stands betwixt his soul and the sight of that Supreme Being which is going to manifest itself to him in the fullness of joy, and whose particular providence supports and protects the just man under the shadow of its wings at the critical hour of death ; so that they may say with the Psalmist (Ps. xxii. 4) : *Though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evils ; for thou, O Lord, art with me.* And again : *I rejoiced at the things that were said to me : We shall go into the house of the Lord*—Ps. cxxi. 1. *Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, for their works follow them*, says St. John in the Apocalypse, xiv. On the other hand, nothing can be conceived more wretched, more dismal, or more deplorable than the death of the wicked, who, ready to be cited before the awful tribunal of an injured God, have nothing to offer Him but a long train of crimes and disorders. They see themselves just launching forth into eternity, with all their iniquities, and with the just apprehensions of what shall follow after their death. The malice and deformity of their sins, which the subtlety of their self-love industriously disguised before, will then be set before their eyes in a true light. The crimes, which before seemed but small faults, by reason of an inveterate habit contracted in vice, will then appear depicted in the blackest die, and prey on their conscience like so many gnawing worms. They will accompany them at their departure out of this world, and as the Scripture says, *they will sleep with them in the grave.* Is there no means of salvation therefore left for them at their dying hour ? God indeed may show mercy to them at the last gasp, for which reason we are not to form a rash judgment, nor pass sentence on any particular sinner ; but is it credible that sinners who abuse God's mercy, and tempt him by designing to live in sin and then to die in grace, after glutting themselves with worldly delights, should snatch heaven in a moment, which the best Christians with difficulty do in many years ? How can they expect to be favored at their death with an extraordinary miracle of grace, whose life earned nothing but anger, and who sacrificed the principal part of it to the service of the devil, and to the gratification of their brutish appetites ! How can their conversion be deemed sincere, who resolve only to abandon their criminal pleasures

when they can enjoy them no more, and to cease to sin when the ability of sinning is taken from them ! However, if a sinner be so unfortunate as to have his repentance to begin at the end of his life, he is not to despair, but should do all that is then in his power, and endeavor to bewail his sins in the bitterness of his soul, begging mercy and pardon for the sake of Jesus Christ. A man who is in danger of being drowned ought to lay hold of a twig or a bulrush, in order to effect his escape, if he can. But as it would be madness to plunge himself into a whirlpool, because there is a bulrush or a twig at the water edge that he may lay hold of, so in like manner it is the height of madness for a sinner to leave the concern of dying well to the hazard of the last hour, or to venture his eternal salvation on so desperate an issue as a death-bed repentance. The only time you can depend on, my brethren, is the present time, whilst you are in health, and capable of having recourse to the Throne of Grace with the necessary dispositions. If you sincerely wish to die the death of the just, and finish your days in peace with God, begin without further delay to live the life of the just, and to spend the remainder of your days in the service of God. Remember your last end, and be ever watchful and always *prepared, because you know not the day nor the hour*, as our Lord says in the Gospel : *Laet ultimus dies, ut observentur omnes dies. The last day is concealed from us*, says St. Augustine, *that we may watch every day*, and not be surprised by death, which comes like a thief at midnight, when least expected—Matt. xxiv. O merciful Jesus, who neither in life nor in death forsakest those who put their trust and confidence in Thee, grant that we may live in Thy grace and die in Thy favor. Preserve us from setting our affections on this sinful Babylon, and enable us to break through all difficulties that oppose our passage to a happy eternity. O may Thy sacred name be the last accent of our tongue, the last motion of our heart, the last sigh of our soul, that whenever we depart this life, we may, through Thy merits, be admitted into the mansions of everlasting bliss. Which, my brethren, I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

TWENTY-FOURTH AND LAST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON THE VILE SIN OF IMPURITY:

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. The abomination of impurity.
- II. Its enormous malignity.
- III. Its effectual remedies and preservatives.
- IV. An appeal for grace to preserve purity.

Cum videritis abominationem desolationis stantem in loco sancto — qui legit intelligat.—*St. Matt. c. xxiv. v. 15.*

When you shall see the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place, he that readeth let him understand.—*St. Matt. c. xxiv. v. 15.*

ALTHOUGH this sacred text is literally understood of the profanation and destruction of the beautiful temple of Jerusalem, yet it may be justly applied in a moral sense, to the abomination of desolation that the base vice and odious sin of impurity brings into the holy place, and sets up in the soul of a Christian, which by baptism becomes the living temple of God and the sanctuary of the Holy Ghost, according to these words of the Apostle : *Do ye not know that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in ye?*—1 Cor. v. Yes, my brethren, such is the dignity, such is the happiness of a Christian as long as he preserves the grace, and lives up to the character of his baptism : but the instant he profanes and defiles his soul and body with the vile sin of impurity, he ceases to be the temple of God, and becomes a sink of filth and abomination, and a receptacle or dwelling-place of the devil, St. Gregory the Great remarks, that there are different sorts of devils and that they have their distinct appellations, this difference arising from the different kinds of sins into which they endeavor to draw poor deluded sinners. There are devils of pride, devils of avarice, devils of lechery, of anger, of gluttony, of envy, of jealousy, of illusion and error, and each of them has his particular character as well as his proper function. The devil of lust, or the impure and unclean devil, is called *Asmodeus*, and his principal study is to get possession of the sinner's heart, and to infect it with the contagion of sensual and carnal pleasures. His malice is such that if he happens to be dislodged and

expelled by means of a sincere repentance, he meditates a speedy return, and sets all his engines at work to procure admittance again, according to these words of the Gospel: *When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he finds no rest or ease till he returns to his former abode, and he brings seven other devils along with him to take up their dwelling-place in the unhappy sinner's soul*—Luke, xi. 24, &c. O how deplorable must the state of that soul be which is thus converted into a receptacle of so many infernal spirits! How odious and detestable must it appear in the sight of a God of infinite sanctity! Nothing can be more opposite to the purity and spirituality of his nature; nothing can remove a Christian at a greater distance from Him, whom none but the pure *and the clean of heart shall see*—Matt. v. 8. May I not, then, justly call the sin of impurity an *abomination of desolation*, since it is so in reality, both in its own nature and effects, as it renders the sinner odious and abominable in the eyes of God, and reduces him to the most miserable of all states? No crime enslaves him more, or involves him in greater misfortunes; no crime is more shameful, more productive of fatal disorders, or forms in the heart a more insupportable sting and remorse of conscience. In short, it is one of the seven capital sins, one of the greatest obstacles of salvation, the seminary of all vices, the poisonous source of numberless evils, and the general cause of the eternal damnation of thousands. To inspire you, therefore, with all the hatred and abhorrence that this foul and destructive monster deserves, and to arm you against its most dangerous influences, is the design of the following discourse, wherein I shall first lay before you its enormous malignity; and secondly, its most effectual remedies and preservatives. Purify our hearts, O Divine Spirit, and cleanse my tongue and lips, as Thou didst heretofore cleanse the lips of the Prophet Isaias, that I may expatiate on this subject to Thy honor and glory, and to the edification of Thy servants assembled here in Thy honor and glory, and to the edification of Thy servants assembled here in Thy name. Obtain for us this favor, O Immaculate Mother of Jesus. It is what we humbly request, through thy intercession, greeting thee in the words of the angel. *Ave Maria.*

Of all the crimes that the unhappy children of Adam are prone to, lust or impurity is the most pernicious and destructive to man, and the most filthy, the most odious and detestable in the sight of God. Its crying malice appears evidently from the hatred and abhorrence which the Almighty has frequently testified against it, and from the many severe and visible scourges with which He has in His wrath punished

it even in this life, and the still greater punishments which He has denounced against it in the next life. There is no crime that the Sacred Scripture gives us a more frightful idea of; no crime that it declares to be more injurious to God, more dishonorable to man, or more deserving of the vengeance and thunderbolts of Heaven. As soon as this foul monster appeared on earth, to show how odious and abominable it was in the eyes of God, the Scripture makes use of the strongest figures of speech, and says, that God, whose nature is incapable of grief, or repentance, or any other passion, was grieved to the heart, and even repented that He had created man—Gen. vi. 5, 6. What a strange expression, and how strongly does it give us to understand the enormity of the sin of lust! We do not read that the Lord *was inwardly touched with sorrow of heart*, or showed regret for having created the angels or our first parents after their fall. We are not told that *he repented* after the murder of Abel, committed by Cain, nor after the other crimes committed in the ages immediately ensuing the creation; but if it were possible, *he repented* as soon as the horrid sin of impurity forced its way into the world, and He resolved to destroy man from the face of the earth, nay, even the very beasts, the reptiles, and the fowls of the air, which were made for the use and service of man. All flesh had corrupted its ways, and the sin of impurity had become so general, that the earth was defiled with wickedness. In order, therefore, to cleanse it from such abominations, the Lord sent the waters of the universal deluge, wherein all mankind, without distinction of age or sex, were swallowed up and drowned, except eight just persons, who were saved in Noah's ark for repeopling a better world.

It was also the heinous crime of impurity that drew down from the heavens the dreadful showers of fire and sulphur, to burn all the inhabitants of five cities alive, and to reduce the neighboring country into ashes. They had given themselves up to sins of impurity, and the malice of their crimes was so enormous, that, as the Scripture says, *it cried to Heaven for vengeance*—Gen. xviii. In consequence of which the Almighty, to show His detestation of their wickedness, rained down fire and brimstone upon them, overthrew their cities, and destroyed their country, which before was *like a Paradise* (Gen. xiii.) but was then turned into a lake of stinking water, and remains to this day, for all posterity, a standing and eternal monument of God's aversion to the vile sin of impurity and uncleanness. We read another instance hereof in the Book of Genesis, where it is related, that Onan, having defiled

the marriage-bed by a sin of lust, was immediately struck dead, *because he had done a detestable thing*—c. xxxviii. 9, 10. The Book of Numbers likewise informs us, that no less than twenty-four thousand persons were put to death at one time, by the express command of God, in punishment of this odious sin—c. xxv. 9. These, and several other visible judgments of this sort recorded in Holy Writ, are convincing proofs of the enormity of the sin of impurity, and sufficiently show how abominable it must be in itself, and how detestable in the eyes of God, whose infinite justice never punishes a sin more than it deserves, and whose infinite mercy generally punishes it less than it deserves, especially in this world, where *the works and effects of his mercy to His creatures, are above all his other works*, and surpass the effects of His justice, as *the heavens surpass the mountains in height*, according to the comparison of the Royal Prophet.

The punishment that the Divine Justice inflicts on the sin of impurity in the next life are severe and dreadful beyond measure, insomuch, that all the chastisements of this life are but feeble representations and shadows of the woeful torrent of wrath, indignation, and vengeance that the Almighty threatens to pour down hereafter upon the criminal heads of the effeminate, the impure, and the unclean. God Himself will be the *judge of fornicators and adulterers*, says St. Paul (Heb. xiii. 4), *and it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God* (Heb. x. 31); and again, *they shall not possess the kingdom of God*—1 Cor. vi. 9. *They have no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ*—Ephes. v. 5. *They shall not obtain the kingdom of God*—Galat. v. 19, 21. *They shall be reserved unto the day of judgment to be tormented*, says St. Peter—2 Ep. ii. 9, 10. *They shall have their portion in the pool burning with fire and brimstone*, says St. John (Apoc. xxi. 8), where they shall have their degree of torments measured out to them, with the most exact proportion to the number and grievousness of the works of the flesh which they have been guilty of in the course of their life, according to these words of the Scripture: *As much as he (the sinner) has been in delight, so much torment let him suffer*. Their torments, in short, may be reduced to these two general heads, which are called by divines *the pain of loss* and *the pain of sense*, that is, they are to be eternally separated from God, and to be eternally environed with unquenchable flames, according to this sentence, which the Sovereign Judge is to pronounce on the last day: *Depart from me, ye accursed, into everlasting fire*. These two pains,

which comprise all their other sufferings, correspond to the two great evils that attend the sin of lust, one of which is an insolent contempt of the Creator, and the other a passionate, blind, inordinate love of the creature. The pain of loss answers the contempt of the Creator, which the impure sinner is guilty of in preferring a created object to his Supreme Majesty, it being just that they who voluntarily turn their backs on the Lord their God, and abandon Him first, should in their turn be abandoned by Him, and should lose Him and be banished out of His sight for ever. The pain of sense, whereby the bodies and senses of impure sinners are to be tormented, answers the inordinate love of the creature, and is inflicted in punishment of the sensual pleasure that impure sinners take in unlawful enjoyments and gratifications, it being just that the senses, which place their last end and happiness in created objects, and in things prohibited by the law of God, should pay for the delights which they taste in committing sin.

If we consult the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, they will tell us that the sin of impurity is so grievous in its own innate nature, that it may be compared to a venomous serpent, which no sooner wounds than it conveys its deadly poison and kills the soul in an instant. Against most of the other commandments of God's Law, the transgression may sometimes be venial, on account of the smallness of the matter ; but everything is generally deemed mortal and damnable that is committed with a full and deliberate consent in matter of impurity. The very desire, without effect, is looked upon as no less criminal than the action itself, according to these words of our Saviour : *Whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart*—Matt. v. 28. St. Remigius says that this sin brings in a more plentiful harvest to the devil, and sends more souls to hell-fire, than all the other sins put together. St. Augustine (Solil. c. 19,) says it may be justly compared to the tail of the dragon mentioned in the Apocalypse, xii., which swept away the third part of the stars of heaven. Holy Job (xxx. 11, 12,) calls it *a grievous iniquity and a fire that devoureth even to perdition, and rooteth up all things that spring*, because it consumes the root of every virtue, dries up the sources of grace, destroys the fruits of a good education, and cancels at once the merits of several years.

Its effects are many, fatal, and deplorable ; it is the bane of every virtue, and the fomentor of every vice, it corrupts the heart, perverts the will, stupifies the mind, blinds the understanding, eclipses the faculty

of reason, sullies the imagination, infects the senses, defiles the body, impairs the health, defaces the image of God in the soul, and degrades man into the similitude and resemblance of a brute beast, as the Royal Prophet speaks—Psal. xlviii. It makes him insensible to all that is noble and generous, or that regards God and his eternal salvation ; for, as the Apostle says, *the sensual man does not perceive the things that are of God*—1 Cor. ii. 14. He has no relish for spiritual things or for the truths of eternity, no taste for hearing sermons or exhortations, no devotion for prayer, no piety for approaching the holy sacraments, no desire for assisting at the divine sacrifice of the Mass. Being immersed in flesh and blood, and totally bent on the pursuit of brutal pleasures, he forgets his Creator, he lays aside all tenderness of conscience, he loses sight of his faith and religion, he is gradually led from one grievous sin into another, and if he once becomes a slave to the vice of impurity, he blindly falls into such infamous disorders, and is so strangely infatuated, that there is scarce any hope left of his conversion. No example can be more striking than that of Solomon, who no sooner became a slave to this detestable sin, than he fell into the grossest errors, and offered incense to false gods, with the same hand that raised the Temple of Jerusalem. He blindly adored idols of gold and silver, because he had previously adored idols of flesh and blood. This is what darkened all the lights of his wisdom, and sapped the very foundation of his faith and religion. Without going so far back, what was the origin of the apostacies and heresies that sprung up in Germany and France about two centuries ago? Did they not proceed from the bosom of corruption? What gave birth to the new gospel of Luther and Calvin, but the horrid vice of lust? So true it is, that this crime bewitches the sinner, and occasions him to stop at nothing in order to gratify his vile passion. He falls almost at every step he goes, until at length his conscience is scared, and, as St. Bernard speaks, becomes a bottomless abyss of iniquity. It is true, indeed, he is not entirely exempted from the stings and lashes of a guilty conscience, for this sin usually leaves behind it such shame and confusion, horror and despair, trouble and agitation, as render an impure heart an image of hell, an anticipated damnation on earth : which made St. Bernard say, that a burning fire, a corroding worm, and the stench of sulphur, are the usual attendants of impurity ; but it captivates those who are habituated to it in so strange a manner, that it often leads them to final impenitence, without feeling any lasting impresson from the most

terrifying truths of the Gospel ; for they grow at length in love with their slavery, and have not courage or resolution enough to break the chains with which they are fettered, or shake off the heavy yoke that galls and torments them without intermission. They scarce entertain a serious thought of returning to God, but continue still filling up the measure of their iniquities, and treasuring up wrath for themselves against the bitter day of wrath, as if a mark of reprobation was set upon them, and they were, as St. Paul speaks (Rom. i. 28), *delivered up to a reprobate sense*, like the sinner of whom the Royal Prophet says : *The sinner has exasperated the Lord, and in the severity of his anger he looks not after him*—Psal. x.

Such, my brethren, are the fatal effects of the vice of impurity, and such is the hatred the Almighty God bears unto all the different species of it. St. Paul forbids Christians even to name it in their conversation—Ephes. v. 3. Their bodies are not their own, but belong to God, and are destined, as well as their souls, to partake one day of His glorious immortality. They are the members of Jesus Christ, who *bought them with a great price*, as the Apostle says—1 Cor. vi. 18, 19. By virtue of His incarnation they contract a strict alliance with Him, and are, in a special manner, obliged to a great purity, both of soul and body. They are purified by the salutary waters of baptism, washed in the blood of the Immaculate Lamb, consecrated with the holy unction in the sacrament of Confirmation, nourished with the Blessed Eucharist, and sanctified like so many tabernacles by the real presence of Christ. What a grievous injury do they not therefore offer to Him, when they debase and defile themselves with impurity ! What a black ingratitude must it be in them to dishonor and pollute His members, and render them *members of ignominy* ! What a horrid crime to profane and *violate his temple* and dwelling-place ! It is herein that the Apostle chiefly constitutes the enormity and crying malice of this sin, and it is for this reason that he assures us, that *God will destroy those who violate his temple*—1 Cor. iii. 17.

In the primitive ages of Christianity, this crime in a Christian was considered as a kind of sacrilege highly injurious to the incarnation of the Son of God, and was punished by the canons of the Church, then in force, with a penitential fast of several years on bread and water, like unto the sins of murder and idolatry, because it partakes of the malice of both the one and the other ; for if the murderer destroys a creature made after God's image, the lecher renews the passion of Jesus

Christ and re-crucifies Him, as the Apostle expresses it. If the idolater offers incense to a false and imaginary god, the lecherous lascivious Christian sacrifices to the favorite of his passion all that is dear to him on earth, his worldly substance, his rest, his health, his conscience. He does not, indeed, adore a statue of wood, of stone, or of metal, says Tertullian, but he adores and worships an idol of flesh and blood, a corruptible worm of the earth, a heap of dust and ashes. He does not immolate the flesh of sheep or of oxen to it, but he immolates his own immortal soul, and that for the sake of a filthy pleasure and a momentary delight. He does not offer incense or perfumes to any inanimate creature, but he devotes his thoughts, his affections, his words, his services, to the accomplice of his iniquity, whom he idolizes on the altar of his heart, and to whom he blindly pays the homage that is due to the living God. But let us briefly consider the remedies against this horrid and abominable crime.

The most effectual remedies and best preservatives against the detestable vice of lechery are, first, an humble diffidence in yourselves, and a strong confidence in God; the one will make you keep at a distance from the danger, and carefully shun and remove all the immediate occasions of sin to the best of your power. The other will excite you to have frequent recourse to fervent prayer, and to apply for the aid of divine grace, that it may support your weakness in the day of battle, and enable you to combat and overcome the temptations and assaults of the enemies of your salvation, which you have it not in your power to shun by flight. There is no temptation so strong or so violent but we may conquer it with the help of God, if conscious of our own frailty and insufficiency, we put our whole trust in Him, earnestly implore His protection, and faithfully correspond with His grace, as the Apostle teaches—1 Cor. x. On the contrary, if, depending too much on our own strength, knowledge, discretion, and age, we throw ourselves without necessity in the way of temptation, and presumptuously seek or remain in the dangerous occasions of sin, there is no temptation so weak or so small but may overcome us, and prove the cause of our spiritual ruin in the end. Without humility, purity and chastity will not be maintained any long time; for, by a just judgment the Lord withdraws His all-powerful hand from the haughty and the proud, and often suffers them to fall into the most shameful disorders in punishment of their pride, according to the Royal Prophet—*Humiliasti sicut vulneratum superbum*. If you therefore wish to preserve an inviolable

purity both of soul and body, be always humble in your own eyes. If you stand, take care lest you fall, says the Apostle. Never rely on your own virtue, wisdom or strength ; but remember that, as St. Jerome observes, *you are not holier than King David, nor wiser than Solomon, nor stronger than Sampson*. Shun the danger ; for, as the Scripture says, *he that loveth danger shall perish in it*—Eccles. iii. 27. *Cut off the hand and foot, pluck out the eye that scandalizes you, and cast it from thee*, according to the rule prescribed by our Saviour (Matt. xviii. 8, 9), that is, quit and renounce whatever is most agreeable and most dear to you on earth, if it be the cause of your spiritual ruin. Lay aside those amorous novels, comedies, romances, and other impious books, which are so apt to effminate the soul, to sully the imagination, to intoxicate the ideas, to inflame the passions, to kindle and nourish the fire of lust, and to instill its poison insensibly into the heart. Avoid those play-houses, those masquerades, those promiscuous dances, where the pomps and vanities of the devil and the world, which you renounced at your baptism, are set off with all their most dangerous allurements. Shun those places, those assemblies, those private interviews, where you have reason to dread that the devil of impurity lies in wait, in order to shoot his fiery darts at your heart and devour your soul. Keep up to the strict rules of Christian modesty, and be guarded against the soothing words of deluding flattery, and the snares of ill-designing persons. O, how many innocent souls make a shipwreck of their virtue for want of taking these precautions ! How many have been trepanned into all the extravagances of a disorderly life, though at first they would have sooner thrown themselves into the jaws of a lion than consented to the crimes they afterward committed without blushing or remorse ! How many who lived only on the tears of penance and the bread of sorrow, have been seduced to fling themselves into the gulf of vice, and to forfeit the merits of fifty or sixty years by relying too much on their own innocence, age, and prudence ! Into what a frightful chaos, into what a dreadful precipice, did one glance of the eye plunge the innocent and holy King David ! He who had prayed to the Lord (Ps. cxxxviii.) to examine his life and sound his heart, fell from his innocence by one unguarded look, and no sooner did he swallow the bait but he cried out, *that torrents of iniquity poured in upon him*.

This plainly shows how necessary it is to guard the outward senses, particularly the eyes and the ears ; for, as these are, as it were, the

windows of the soul, and the doors and avenues through which the death of sin usually enters and makes its way to the mind, if they be neglected and left open to every object and every indelicate discourse that invites and allures to sin, the heart will be exposed to the evident danger of being enslaved by its irregular inclinations, as a city is exposed to the danger of being easily subdued and compelled to surrender when the outworks are left unguarded, and the gates lie open at all hours for the enemy to enter in whenever he pleases. *Our life here on earth* is called by holy Job *a warfare* (c. vii.) and we are stationed in this world as in a state of probation and a field of battle, environed on every side with enemies within and without, visible and invisible, always vigilant and never at rest. It is impossible to shun them all, and it would be rash to face and combat them all; so that, to fly the danger with prudence whenever we can, and to combat with courage whenever we can save ourselves by flight, is the great art of the spiritual warfare wherein we are engaged. Let a man be ever so just, he is still liable to fall during the course of his mortal life. Even the most virtuous are not entirely exempted from sensible impressions, as long as their souls are united to mortal bodies, and act by the ministry of the senses; for, as they are children of Adam, they must expect, more or less, to feel the sad effects of the deep wounds which his disobedience has inflicted on his offspring. This is what caused the great St. Paul to long to be disengaged from the prison of his body, and cry out, in his Epistle to the Romans (c. vii. 24): *Unhappy man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* that is, from this mortal flesh with its sinful lusts. He perceived in himself, as he tells us, a kind of *law*, or impulse of depraved nature, *fighting against the law of his mind*, and he wished to be totally divested of it; but the Lord, who knows how to make our very infirmities contribute to our advantage, gave him to understand, that *divine grace was sufficient* to protect him from danger, and that *virtue increases and is perfected in weakness*.

Christians, indeed, are delivered at their baptism from the guilt of original sin, and from the punishment due to it, by the sanctifying grace of Jesus Christ: but to be entirely delivered from all temptation to sin is a privilege reserved for the life to come, when the happy change of our state will not only free us from sin, but likewise from every incentive and temptation to it. Until then concupiscence, which St. Augustine calls an incentive to sin, *fomes peccati*, as it inclines man to fix his

heart on carnal pleasures, and to seek his happiness in the gratification of his senses, and in the enjoyment of riches, honors, and dignities, is permitted to remain even in the just and the elect, for a trial of their fidelity, *ad agonem*. We may fly from the devil and from the world, but we cannot fly from this domestic enemy, it being so closely interwoven with corrupt nature that nothing but death can totally destroy it. Like a weight, it presses mortals down toward the earth, and like a sickness it disturbs and agitates them, and puts them in danger of forfeiting life everlasting if they yield to its suggestions, and suffer their hearts to be seduced by its illusions. However, we have it in our power, with the assistance of God's grace, to weaken its influence, and to restrain it from doing us any mischief by resisting it properly, and putting an immediate stop to its very first motions. It is on the resistance and defense that we make, and the victory which we gain, that our salvation depends. *Be thou faithful until death, and I will give thee the crown of life*—Apoc. ii. 10. And again: *Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he hath been proved, he shall receive the crown of life, which God hath promised to them that love him*—James i. 12. Above all things, we must watch and guard our heart, according to the following advice of the wise man (Prov. iv.): *My son, guard thy heart with all care and diligence*; for as all sin begins with a bad thought, and is bred in the heart before it breaks out into action, the most effectual way to overcome it is to suppress it in its very root, and to prevent the temptation from reaching the heart. If the heart once consents and yields to it, though it be but for a short time, the soul is defiled with sin (James, i. 15); but if the heart and the will make a vigorous resistance, and repel the evil suggestion the instant it presents itself to the imagination, the temptation, instead of being hurtful, becomes an occasion of merit, and affords a Christian an opportunity to entitle himself to a reward for having gained a victory over it. To insure success in this spiritual warfare, he is to reject the slightest idea and the least evil thought with as much speed as he would throw off a burning coal; for otherwise, like unto a little fire or small spark that is not immediately extinguished in time, it may cause a great conflagration and blaze that will not be easily quenched, as St. Gregory observes. *Resist the devil* (says St. James. iv. 7), *and he will fly from you*. The monster must be stifled at his very birth, and smothered in the cradle, says St. Jerome; he must be attacked, combated, and repelled in the beginning, whilst he is weak, and before he gets any

footing, gains any ground, or has time to make himself master of the soul.

Fasting is another powerful remedy and sovereign preservative. This is the preservative that St. Jerome made use of in the desert, and recommended to others. We must, says he, quench the fiery darts of the devil by temperance and rigorous fasts, and herein fear not to prejudice your health, for it is better to have the body sick than the soul distempered. The heat of concupiscence is to be allayed by abstinence, and the fire of lust must be quenched by withdrawing whatever serves like fuel to feed and foment the passions. Flesh and blood are prone to rebellion, though tamed by abstinence and restrained by necessity, but they are much more mutinous when pampered with ease and fed with delicacies. It is to surfeiting, idleness, and drunkenness, that the Prophet Ezechiel attributes all the criminal practices of the Sodomites (c. xvi.), and that the Prophet Jeremias ascribes the adulteries of the Israelites—c. lvii. Drunkenness, says St. Ambrose, is the mother of all crimes and the shipwreck of chastity. Christ therefore cautions us (Luke, xxi. 34), *to take heed to ourselves, lest at any time our hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness.* He tells us also (Matt. xvii. 20), that the impure and unclean spirit is *one of that kind of devils which is not to be cast out but by prayer and fasting.* It was by fasting that the Pauls, the Anthonys, the Hilarions, and numberless other saints, armed themselves against all the assaults and temptations of the devil, the world, and the flesh. It was, in fine, by fasting that Christ our Lord prepared Himself for combating against the devil in the desert. He had no occasion to fear the infection of the world, or the contagion of bad example. He neither had faults to expiate, nor passions to suppress, nor evil inclinations to destroy, nor even virtues to acquire. He was holiness itself. His godhead placed Him in a region above sin, and impeccability was as inseparably annexed to His person as the divinity. But He was willing to give us His life as a model, as well as His blood for a ransom, and to leave us an example of every virtue we stood in need of. O merciful Lord, be Thou our guide, our protector, and safeguard, amidst all the snares and tempting allurements of this life. If Thou be for us we have nothing to dread. What can our enemies do against us? And if Thou ceaseest to support us, we fall into our original nothing. All our hope for mercy, grace, and salvation, is in Thee alone. We are the work of Thy hands and the price of Thy blood, O Jesus. Our souls and bodies are both Thy creatures. Grant

that nothing but sanctity and purity may dwell in them. Make us sensible that we have been made and redeemed for better things than to feed on the husks of swine, or wallow in the mire of unclean and brutal pleasures. *Create in us a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within our bowels.* Thou knowest the many dangers to which our weakness is exposed on every side. We can scarce advance a step without meeting objects to dissipate us, vanities to blind us, perishable goods to seduce us, and emissaries of Satan to lead us astray. In the midst of so many dangers, what can we do but raise our feeble voice to the throne of Thy grace, and say with Thy Prophet: *Save us, O Lord, because we have no inheritance but misery and sin.* We are nothing but frail and brittle vessels of clay, which are easily shattered to pieces. Grant that, according to the advice of Thy Apostle, we may be *sobri and watchful against the assaults of the enemy, and offer our bodies to thee as an only and immaculate host.* O may the fire of Thy divine love ever burn in our hearts, make us run with cheerfulness in the way of Thy precepts, and dispose our souls for the inheritance of Thy heavenly kingdom. Which, my brethren, I sincerely wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

CHRISTMAS DAY.

ON THE INCARNATION AND NATIVITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. The promise of a Redeemer, and the state of the world before the birth of Christ.
- II. The marvels and advantages of the Incarnation.
- III. Prophecies on and circumstances of the Incarnation.
- IV. Lessons to be learned from the Incarnation.
- V. Peroration.

Verbum Caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis.—*St. Jo. c. 1, v. 14.*

The Word was made Flesh, and dwelt among us.—*St. John, c. 1, v. 14.*

It is on the present solemnity, if ever, that we have reason to cry out with the Apostle, in his eleventh chapter to the Romans: *O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are his judgments, and how unsearchable his ways!*

When the angels fell from the sacred mansions of bliss by their pride, they were irretrievably lost ; no Redeemer was promised to them ; no remedy was provided for their relief ; no means were granted to them, whereby they might have recovered the grace which they had forfeited. But glory, honor, and praise be to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, the case was quite different with regard to mankind. Immediately after the fall of our first parents, God most mercifully promised to send a Redeemer—Gen. iii. 15. He vouchsafed to renew this promise from time to time, and gradually disposed all things for the accomplishment of His boundless mercy. However, upward of four thousand years had elapsed after the creation and fall of Adam before the promised Redeemer and long-expected Messiah came ; for had man been restored to grace as soon as he had forfeited it, he would not have been sufficiently sensible of the depth of his wounds, nor have had a just feeling of the spiritual blindness, weakness, and wretchedness in which he lay buried under the weight of his guilt ; neither would the infinite power, wisdom, and goodness of God, in providing so effectual a means and so sovereign a remedy for taking away the sins of the world, have appeared so eminently conspicuous.

Mankind, therefore, by a just judgment, was left groveling in the mass of corruption and misery for the space of several ages, and only enjoyed a glimpse of their future redemption in the promise and expectation of the Messiah and Deliverer who was then to come. It is true, many were saved in the interim by faith and hope in Him, God having from time to time raised a number of faithful servants, to whom He revealed this mystery ; He was also pleased to choose and reserve to Himself a peculiar people, by whom He was known and worshiped ; but almost all the nations of the earth were covered with a deluge of iniquity, and overrun with a multitude of the blackest crimes. The bondage of the children of Israel in Egypt, and the captivity of the Jews in Babylon, were but faint shadows of the deplorable bondage and captivity in which the infernal Pharaoh held the generality of the unhappy offspring of Adam. From every corner of the world vice cried aloud to Heaven for vengeance, and sinful man deserved nothing at the hands of God but eternal damnation and everlasting torments ; nevertheless, then it was that the divine mercy superabounded, when sin had thus abounded ; then it was that the heavens were opened and began to flow with honey, as the Church beautifully expresses it in the office of this happy day ; then it was that the eternal Son of the eternal God, looking down on

us with an eye of pity, descended from the throne of His glory to save forlorn man ; then it was, in fine, that the Divine Word *was incarnated for our sake, and came to dwell among us*, poor sinful worms of the earth, in order to become our Redeemer, our Mediator, our Advocate, our Model, our Guide, and the Physician of our souls.

This adorable mystery of His incarnation, above all other mysteries, merits our particular attention, challenges our most profound respect and homage, and should be the principal object of our piety and devotion during the ensuing octave ; it is the source of all the other great mysteries and graces of our redemption ; in it we behold the incomprehensible power, wisdom, and goodness of our God, displayed to an amazing degree ; in it we discover a prodigy of omnipotence, to excite our astonishment, adoration, and praise ; and a prodigy of love, to kindle in our souls the affections of an ardent love for the Lord our God. To inspire you, therefore, with the like tender sentiments, I will endeavor to lay briefly before you the principal circumstances of this wonderful mystery, and the manner in which it has been accomplished. Let us first implore the divine assistance, through the intercession of the Blessed Mother of Jesus, saying with the angel, *Ave Maria, &c.*

The mystery of the incarnation is to be adored in silent raptures of admiration, rather than to be expressed by words ; it is a prodigy that angels and men will admire for all eternity, without being able to fathom it. Here He who is wonderful in all His works has outdone what creatures could have known to be possible, even to Omnipotence itself, had they not seen it effected and accomplished ; but it is for this reason more worthy an infinite God. It is incomprehensible to the spirit of man, and nothing but the Spirit of God could give us a just idea of it.—This the inspired Apostle has done (Philip c. ii. v. 7), when he says, that *God annihilated himself in taking on the form and similitude of a slave* ; for what is the incarnation of the Son of God but the most astonishing humiliation of the Deity, but the annihilation of a God, since there is an infinite distance between God, who is an infinite and immense being, and man, who is a mere empty contemptible nothing ! In the other mysteries of human redemption, I see nothing after this that astonishes me so much ; for that a God, made man, has embraced poverty, contempt, sufferings, and death on the cross, was but the consequence, and as it were the engagements of the humanity with which He vested Himself ; but that a God of infinite majesty, all God as He is, should make Himself man ; that the eternal Son of the eternal

Father should strip Himself, as it were, of the rays of His glory, clothe His omnipotence with our weakness, shut up His immensity in a little body, and be born in time, under the veil and figure of a child, under the form and similitude of a slave, is something far more wonderful than the creation of the-world out of nothing, or the moving the heavens and weighing the universe with a finger.

The Holy Scripture, speaking of this mystery, not only says that the Son of God became man, but makes use of an expression which gives us to understand that He chose in man what was most gross and most terrestrial. *The Word was made flesh*, says St. John the Evangelist. That *flesh*, so despicable ; that *flesh*, subject to so many miseries ; that *flesh*, which is common to us with the brute creation, He took on, and rendered it common to Himself with us. He made Himself like unto us. He espoused our nature. He remained for the space of nine months confined in the bosom of His mother, like other children. He became an infant like unto them, subject to all the humiliations, all the infirmities, and all the weaknesses of that tender age. O stupendous prodigy ! O astonishing humiliations ! O amazing annihilations of the only begotten Son of God, how inconceivable are ye ! There is some proportion between man and the smallest insect that crawls on the face of the earth ; but there never was, there never will be, there never can be, the least proportion between God and man. Yet the *Word incarnate* has vouchsafed to humble Himself thus for our sake, even to a degree of *annihilation*, and to unite in one and the same person two natures, so different as God and man, the Lord and the servant, the Creator and the creature, the highest and the lowest, all that is great in heaven with all that is little upon earth. All other favors and benefits, though great in themselves, appear to be eclipsed by this wonderful condescension of His goodness ; nay, they seem in a manner to lose their value in comparison of this unparalleled instance, this inestimable pledge of His love, it being such, that from it alone we can truly judge to what an excessive degree He loved us, and to what misery sin had unhappily reduced us. Had He not contrived this wonderful expedient to become our Mediator and Redeemer, the gates of heaven would have remained eternally shut against us, and we would have been lost and undone for ever, no pure creature being capable of repairing the injury, or atoning for the offense committed against the infinite majesty of God by sin, as nothing less was required to cancel it, by an equality of justice, than the merits and humiliations of a person of infinite dignity and value. This made the

Prophet Jeremias cry out and say (chap. i.): It is owing to the pure mercy of the Lord that we have not been all destroyed and ruined for ever. He was pleased, without any title on our part, to set His affections upon us, poor worms of the earth, and to show us more mercy than He did to the fallen angels. O ye Heavens, be astonished hereat! He humbled Himself to exalt us. He *impoverished Himself*, 'says St. Paul (2 Cor. xviii.) to enrich our souls with the treasures of His heavenly graces and blessings. He stooped infinitely beneath the dignity of His supreme majesty, in order to raise us from the profound abyss of misery, to the eminent dignity of His adoptive children, and heirs of His kingdom.

The bare expectation and foreknowledge of these signal advantages and benefits which were to accrue to mankind from the mystery of His incarnation, filled the holy patriarchs, prophets, and other saints of the Old Testament with consolation, and made them ardently and incessantly sigh, weep, and pray for the completion of this great mercy. At length the time appointed by Providence for human redemption drawing nigh, God's eternal decrees were brought about and executed. An angelical ambassador was dispatched from Heaven to announce the adorable mystery to the spotless Virgin who was chosen, in preference to all other creatures, to be the Mother of the world's Redeemer. The glorious St. John the Baptist was sent as a precursor, to prepare the way before Him. Accordingly He appeared in the deserts of Judea, like a morning star, to usher in the sun of Divine Justice and the light of the world. The seventy weeks of years, predicted by the Prophet Daniel were nearly expired. The royal sceptre was departed from the house of Juda, according to the renowned prophecy of the patriarch Jacob. The fourth great empire, foretold by Daniel, was exalted to its zenith. The Roman wars were brought to a happy conclusion, and the gates of the temple of Janus in Rome were shut, according to the usual custom on similar occasions. In short, the world enjoyed the sweets of a general peace, under the fortunate reign of the Emperor Augustus. This was the very period that the promised Messiah, and the desired of all nations, who in the Scripture is styled *the Prince of Peace*, chose for visiting the earth, to denote thereby that the end of His coming was to make a general peace between His Heavenly Father and mankind. At this juncture of time an edict was issued by the Emperor, commanding all the subjects of his whole empire, and consequently of Judea and Palestine, then a Roman province, to repair to the respective places of their origin and family,

in order to have their names and conditions enrolled there in a public register. This decree was published by the emperor for political views of state, but the view of the all-ruling providence of God herein was, that by this most authentic act of public registration, it might be manifest to the whole world that our Blessed Saviour was descended of the house of David, and the tribe of Juda, and that He was to register the names of His faithful followers and disciples in the book of eternal life. It was in obedience to the aforesaid imperial edict that Mary and Joseph traveled from Nazareth, where they lived, about ninety miles from Jerusalem, to Bethlehem, a small town in the tribe of Juda, called David's-Town, this being the place appointed for those who belonged to his family to be enrolled, and the very place also where the Saviour of the world was to be born. This leads me to the second point, wherein I promised to expatiate on the circumstances of His Nativity.

As our Divine Redeemer was pleased to choose the great city of Jerusalem for the ignominy of His Passion, so He chose the little town of Bethlehem for the glory of His Nativity. The prophet Micheas, upward of seven hundred years before, had foretold that Bethlehem, which was about seven miles distant from Jerusalem, should be ennobled by the birth of Christ. Hence the Blessed Virgin Mary, by a special direction of Providence, undertook a painful journey of at least four days, through a mountainous country to that place, having no other retinue but her chaste and holy spouse Joseph, who was appointed by Heaven to be her guardian and protector amidst all the hardships she had to encounter. On their arrival in Bethlehem they found all the inns of that town already full; in vain did they seek for a lodging elsewhere, every one despising and rejecting their poverty. In this distress they retired into an open cottage, or a cave on the side of a rock, commonly called a *stable*, as it was only fit to defend beasts from the nipping frosts in winter, and from the scorching heat of the sun in summer. This abject and contemptible hovel, this vile receptacle of beasts was the palace that the King of Heaven, and the Lord and Master of the universe, was pleased to choose for His Nativity; the throne on which He chose to repose was a manger; a little hay or straw supplied the place of a bed, and the breath of an ox and an ass, which happened to be tied to the manger, served to keep off the cold, and to preserve the Divine Infant from the rigor of the season; for it was in the depth of winter that He was born, to signify that He came from Heaven to kindle the fire of charity on earth, and to warm the frozen hearts of sinners with

the flames of divine love. He was born at midnight, to denote that He came to disperse the darkness of infidelity, and to enlighten the world with the light of the Gospel. He chose to be born by miracle, of a most pure and chaste virgin, to show what a lover He is of the angelical virtue of chastity. He chose to be born in a state of poverty, to set us an example of evangelical poverty, which He preferred to all the grandeur and riches of the world, and to teach us, that they who are really poor in spirit and affection, and submit with patience and resignation to the hardships incident to their state, bid fair for everlasting happiness hereafter, as He afterward expressly declared, in His first sermon on the Mount, saying: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.* He could have been born in the midst of splendor and opulence, but He would not, because it was not such a Redeemer that the world wanted, or our miseries required, since worldly pomp and grandeur would serve to inflame our passions, and nourish our spiritual maladies, rather than cure them. The carnal and sensual Jews, who were strongly attached to earthly goods, and bent upon the gratification of their passions, flattered themselves with the idea that the Messias, whom they expected, would reign here on earth as a most powerful temporal Monarch, and surpass Solomon in riches, and David in military exploits; for they erroneously understood, in a literal sense, whatever the prophets had said in a figurative sense, of the splendor and glory of the spiritual kingdom of His Church in the new law. They saw clearly, and could not but acknowledge, that the time foretold and appointed for His coming had at length arrived, yet they obstinately refused to believe in Him, being offended and scandalized at the abject, poor, and humble condition, in which He made His appearance. This made the Prophet Isaias say (c. i. v. 3): *The ox knoweth its owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel hath not known me.* And again, St. John the Evangelist (c. i. v. 10, 11): *The world knew him not he came into his own, and his own received him not.*

Alas! my brethren, how widely different are the counsels and views of God, and how far above the counsels and views of men! Our Divine Redeemer was willing to begin from His very birth in the stable of Bethlehem, to execute the design He had formed to promote the honor and glory of His Eternal Father, and to work the salvation of man, by atoning for the offense offered to the Godhead by sin, and repairing by His humility and sufferings, what mankind had forfeited by

their pride and sensuality. With this view He made choice of a state of humiliation and poverty from the beginning of His mortal life. He exposed His tender, delicate body to the inclemency of the severest season of the year, to the hard boards of a manger instead of a cradle, and to a privation of the most ordinary conveniences and necessities of human life. Love for us, and His desire for our salvation, would not suffer Him to postpone this great work to the end of His life. He was willing to enter upon the sacred functions of a Redeemer, a Guide, and a Teacher, as soon as He came into the world. He was willing, by embracing such hardships and rigors in His very infancy, to correct the mistaken notions and confound the folly of sinners, who blindly set their hearts and affections on perishable riches, and place all their happiness on earthly enjoyments. He was willing to encourage us, by His own example, to despise the sinful vanities of the world, to renounce the love of sensual pleasures and delights, and to plant the virtue of humility deeply in our hearts; for as all our spiritual disorders spring from three poisonous sources, called by St. John, *concupiscence of the flesh, concupiscence of the eyes, and pride of life*, it was expedient that He who came to be our Saviour, Guide, and Physician, should take the earliest opportunity to prescribe suitable remedies against the inordinate inclinations of our corrupt nature, and inculcate the necessity of counter-acting them, by the practice of the opposite virtues. Whilst He was thus silently teaching and preaching by His example, from the manger of Bethlehem, as from His first pulpit, the air was filled with a charming melody, and began to echo with congratulatory acclamations; for, as St. Luke informs us (c. ii.) the angels assembled in choir sounded forth the divine praise in the loudest strains, singing, *Gloria, &c.—Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will*; for such were the happy fruits of Christ's nativity, glory to God in the highest heavens, and peace, that is, reconciliation, grace, and pardon to men on earth. A heavenly messenger was likewise sent to carry the joyful tidings of His nativity, not to any of the proud and haughty grandees of the world, who lived at their ease, wallowing in riches, sensual pleasures, and delights, but to a set of humble shepherds, who were keeping the night watches over their flocks. It was to them in particular that the Angel of the Lord appeared, and brought the first news of their Saviour being born. Why so? To give us to understand that the meek and humble are the favorites of Heaven, and that it is to them the Lord dispenses His gracious favors and blessings in abundance,

while He resists the proud and withdraws Himself away from them. The humble shepherds were at first struck with panic, and trembled at the splendid and awful appearance of the angel; but being animated by him they soon forgot their fears, and hastened with devotion to Bethlehem. They entered the stable, and found there the new-born Saviour of the world lying in a manger. Far from being scandalized at the poverty and meanness of His appearance, they were filled with admiration at the infant state to which the Creator of the universe had humbled Himself for the love of man. They saw and they believed. They paid Him the just tribute of their homage, and returned glorifying and praising the Lord, and speaking with raptures of what they had seen. How many instructive and salutary lessons, my brethren, how many endearing motives of divine love, does this mystery furnish and suggest! Does not every circumstance loudly proclaim the power, wisdom and mercy of God, and demonstrate the greatness of His goodness, charity, and love for man? Must we not be insensible to the last degree, if our hearts be not penetrated with lively sentiments of gratitude and love for Him who has wrought such wonders in our favor? The more He has humbled Himself for our sake, the dearer He should be to us, and the greater ought the fervor of our devotion to be in making Him a tender of our homage, by acts of adoration, praise and thanksgiving.

O let us, therefore, join our hearts and voices, this day, with the heavenly choirs of angels, in glorifying and saluting Him with sacred hymns and canticles of spiritual joy; let us, in imitation of the pious shepherds, humbly approach the manger of Bethlehem, and welcome our Blessed Saviour into the world. Let us give Him the best reception we are able, and embrace with Him the most tender affections of our souls. Let us prostrate ourselves in spirit a thousand times at His feet, and entreat Him to come and take full possession of our hearts. Let us be careful in removing every obstacle, and in preparing a worthy mansion for Him in the temple of our souls, that He may be spiritually born in us by His sanctifying grace, and dwell in us, and we in Him, for time and eternity. Let us give ourselves entirely to Him, in return for His having given Himself entirely to us. His sweet and amiable countenance, which was afterward beaten, bruised, and disfigured for our iniquities; His lovely eyes, which shed so many tears for our sins: His sacred hands and feet, which were nailed to a cross for our sake, and His little delicate veins, already purpled with the precious blood

which He poured out so copiously on Mount Calvary for our redemption, they all cry out to us this day with a loud voice, that we ought to engrave the sweet and adorable name of JESUS on our hearts, in the deepest characters of love.

O Divine Jesus ! we adore, praise, thank, and glorify Thee, for all Thou hast done and suffered for our sake. The most acceptable return we are able to make Thee is to love Thee with our whole heart, and to testify our love and gratitude by the observance of Thy commandments, and the practice of good works. We offer our hearts therefore, to Thee, without reserve ; cleanse and purify them, we beseech Thee, from all the foul stains of sin, and inflame them with the sacred fire of charity, which Thou didst come to kindle on earth. Do not suffer us to frustrate the designs of Thy mercy by our perverseness, but give us grace to begin with Thee a new life from this happy day of Thy Nativity, and to persevere to the end steady and faithful in Thy service, that, after having been replenished with Thy graces here, we may be admitted hereafter to partake of Thy glory in the sacred mansions of bliss. Which is the happiness I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

SUNDAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD.

ON THE DUTIES OF PARENTS TO THEIR CHILDREN.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. The history of the Presentation.
- II. The importance and necessity of giving children an early Christian education.
- III. The manner of doing it, and its particular duties.
- IV. Its rewards and its consolation.

Perfecerunt omnia secundum legem Domini.—St. Luc. c. ii. v. 39.

They performed all things according to the law of the Lord.—St. Luke, c. ii. v. 39.

THE Gospel informs us, that the Blessed Virgin Mary, accompanied with her most chaste spouse St. Joseph, repaired to the city of Jerusalem as soon after the Nativity of our Lord as she was allowed by the Mosaic law to approach the sanctuary, and enter into the temple of God. She brought with her the child Jesus, in order to present Him there to His Eternal Father with the most perfect acts of adoration, praise, and thanksgiving. On this occasion a just and religious man in Jerusalem, named Simeon, who had received a revelation and promise from the Holy Ghost that before his death he should see Christ the Saviour of the world, came by divine instinct into the Temple, took the child Jesus out of His mother's hands into his arms, and praised the Lord, in raptures of devotion for having vouchsafed to grant him the happiness of embracing the object of all his desires, and beholding with his eyes the light of the Gentiles, and the glory of the people of Israel, who came for the redemption and salvation of all men, though as Simeon predicted at the same time, on account of the willful blindness and obstinacy of many unbelievers, who discharged the arrows and darts of their malice against Him, and His doctrine, He became, as it were, a mark of contradiction for their ruin, and for the ruin of others, who like them, refuse to believe in Him, and choose to remain in their obstinacy and incredulity. A prophetess called Anna, venerable for her age, and more so for her piety, was likewise present on the same occasion. The sacred text relates, that she was then advanced to the age

of four score and four years, and that she constantly attended in the Temple at the times of prayer, *with fastings and prayers, serving God both day and night*. This holy widow was blessed with the sight of the child Jesus in the Temple, and made a public profession of her faith in Him. She bore testimony that He was the promised Messias, and praised and glorified the Lord for having sent Him for the consolation and redemption of Israel. In the interim, Mary and Joseph, struck with admiration at all they had seen and heard concerning Him, complied with all the ordinances of the law ; and having presented the child Jesus in the Temple, an offering that infinitely surpassed all the offerings that had ever been made there before, they returned from Jerusalem home to the city of Nazareth, and Jesus, in proportion as He advanced in age, gave every day marks of His divine wisdom, and manifested more and more the heavenly treasures of grace, with which He was replenished from the very first instant of His conception. The care that Mary and Joseph took of Him should be the model of all Christian parents, and ought to teach them to present their children to God from their very infancy, and to offer them up to the honor of His divine majesty as so many pure holocausts ; in short, they should give them an early tincture of piety and religion, instill principles of virtue into their tender minds, and educate them in the fear and love of the Lord, as I purpose, with the divine assistance, to show you in the following discourse. The importance and necessity of giving children an early virtuous education, shall be the subject of the first point. The manner in which this is to be done, and the particular duties that are comprised under this general head, shall be the subject of the second point, and of your favorable attention. Before we proceed, let us invoke the intercession of the Blessed Mother of Jesus, and devoutly recite the angelical salutation. *Ave Maria, &c.*

All civilized nations look upon an early and virtuous education of children as an object of the first magnitude, and as one of the most effectual means to stop the progress of impiety, to promote the honor and glory of God, to advance the happiness of every country, to preserve peace and order in society, and to prevent the ruin and destruction of numberless souls. It is for this reason that no establishments are deemed more necessary, more useful, or more worthy of encouragement, than such as are wisely instituted, and regularly calculated for the laudable purpose of cultivating the tender minds of youth, and sowing the seeds of virtue in the souls of children at an early period of life ; for as they

come into the world with a deplorable ignorance of the great truths that lead to eternal bliss, and with a strong propensity and violent bent to evil, it is evident that if they be neglected and left to themselves without proper culture, and destitute of the advantages of a virtuous education, they will be apt to rush blindly into all kind of irregularities, and to produce nothing but weeds, tares and noxious fruits, like unto a piece of ground that is not carefully attended, cultivated and improved. Corrupt nature and bad example will lead them into a long train of sinful disorders, their uncontrolled passions will daily acquire new strength, and bear them down the rapid torrent of iniquity, and, as the Scripture expresses it: *Their bones shall be filled with the vices of their youth, and they shall sleep with them in the dust*—Job. c. xx. v. 11. The measures which they adopt, and the steps which they take at the critical juncture, usually determine their future conduct ever after, and have a very considerable influence upon their happiness or unhappiness, both in this world and the next. When they go astray in the beginning of their career, they generally plunge from one error to another, and die as they lived; for as a good beginning makes a good end, so, on the contrary, a bad beginning is generally followed by a vicious life, and terminates in an unhappy death. Holy Writ furnishes us with several remarkable instances hereof. Amongst the rest, we read that amongst the nineteen kings of Israel, there was not one that lived or died well, because there was not one of them that began well; and of the twenty kings of Judah, there were but six who concluded a virtuous life with a happy death, because only six of them had been virtuously educated in their youthful days. Hence the Prophet Jeremias says: *It is good for a man to carry the yoke of the Lord from his youth, because he will not readily depart in his old age from the path into which he enters in his youth*—Prov. xxii. 6. *The first impressions are the most lasting*, says St. Jerome, *and are not to be effaced without much difficulty*. Whilst children are young, they are susceptible of every impression, and may be moulded, like a piece of soft wax, into any form and shape; they may be readily drawn to good or evil, to virtue or to vice, like unto a young, tender plant, which is so flexible that it may be easily bent on every side; but as a plant, when it has once sprung up into a tree, is no longer pliable, but will sooner break than bend after some years growth, so in like manner, when the growth of children's passion is not checked and prevented by seasonable remedies; when they are not formed and modelled to virtue in due time; when vice is once suffered to take deep root in their hearts,

they generally become inflexible and incorrigible, and continue to advance in their evil ways as they advance in age ; or if they ever happen to reform their lives, it is not without great difficulty, and the powerful aid of an extraordinary grace from God, which they have no right to expect, after having devoted the first fruits and the bloom of their life to the drudgery of sin, and to the service of Satan.

It is, therefore, a matter of the utmost consequence what ideas are first stamped on the ductile minds of children, what sentiments are impressed on their hearts, and to what habits they are formed in their childhood. The happiness of parents themselves, both for time and eternity, no less than that of their children depends in a great measure hereon. St. Paul tells us, in his first Epistle to Timothy (c. v. v. 8) that parents who do not pay the necessary care and attention to the education of their children, betray their trust, act in opposition to their faith, and are worse than infidels. *If any man, says this great Apostle, has not care of his own, and especially those of his house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.* What judgment, then, is to be formed of those unhappy parents who are not only careless and deficient in giving their children a Christian education, but contrive so many infernal stratagems to banish and destroy their young infants before they are born and baptized. Are they not more unnatural than wolves and tigers ? Are they not more cruel than Herod himself, who sacrificed so many holy innocents to his pride and ambition ? The cruelty of that blood-thirsty tyrant is justly detested by every one who has the least sense of humanity ; though, as St. Augustine remarks, his malice and hatred to the innocent infants he murdered was of greater service to them than his love could have been, since he was the occasion of their being baptized in their own blood, and receiving a crown of martyrdom in the kingdom of Heaven. He only killed their bodies, which secured the salvation of their souls ; whereas, antichristian parents, who by the most horrid means prevent the birth of their infants, and murder them by anticipation before they come into the world, destroy both their souls and bodies, and deprive them at once of a temporal and everlasting life. Hear what St. Thomas of Villanova says of such unnatural parents : Now, they may seem to escape unpunished, as their crimes are covered with darkness, and committed in the greatest secrecy, but the time will come when their impiety shall be manifested in the face of the universe, and when they shall feel the whole weight of God's wrath and indignation. The infants they have destroyed ; and the souls they have been the

means of sending into the other world without baptism, will demand satisfaction at the bar of divine justice; they will cry out to heaven for vengeance with as loud a voice as the blood of Abel formerly cried out for vengeance against Cain, the first murderer; nay, with a louder voice, since the spiritual murder and loss of a soul, stamped with the image of God, and ransomed with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, is a much more deplorable evil, and one of the most enormous crimes that the malice of Satan can suggest. Remember then, O fathers and mothers, that your care and attention to your infants is, in some respects, to commence even before their birth. If you wish to be blessed with good children, you are to supplicate Heaven for them, and in the interim to refrain from drunkenness, from intemperance, and all kind of criminal excesses that might prove any way destructive to their souls or bodies, or tend to invert the laws of nature, or frustrate the holy ends of matrimony. After their birth, you are to take all possible care to have them purified without delay from original sin, in the sacred laver of baptism; and like Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and Anna, the mother of Samuel, to make an offering of them to the Lord with the most lively sentiments of praise and thanksgiving. If you expect to succeed in their education, you must begin first with yourselves, reform your own lives, and bridle your passions, as children frequently take after their parents, resemble them in their temper, and inherit their humors and dispositions, from, as it were, a kind of secret influence or sympathy that naturally subsists between them. Some of the ancient pagan philosophers observing this natural connexion and resemblance, and not being able to account properly for it, were so weak as to give into the erroneous doctrine of the transmigration of souls, or to teach, as St. Augustine relates, that one part of the father and mother's soul was transmitted into the bodies of their children, which ridiculous opinion is justly exploded, and condemned by the Church of God, as being opposite to sound reason and divine revelation.

Now, as to the particular obligations which parents contract with regard to the education of their children, they consist chiefly in love, instruction, correction, good example, and prayer. Their first duty is to love their children. Christ our Lord, in the parable of the Prodigal Son, shows parents what ought to be their love for their children. Nature itself dictates this obligation. The serpents, lions, and wolves, as St. Augustine observes (Serm. 185), love their young ones by an impulse of nature, and feed and rear them until they are in a condition

to provide for themselves ; the wild bird suffers itself to be made captive, rather than desert its callow offspring, and the timid hen fights and perishes by the hawk, rather than surrender her little brood ; and shall any Christians be so unnatural, and so inferior to the very brute creation in this respect, as to abandon their little infants in the streets and entries, never more to behold them ? Shall they be so unmerciful as to expose them to the mercy of the public, without caring what will afterward become of their souls, or whether they are likely to be brought up in the fear and love of God, and in the principles of the Christian religion ? Shall they be so hard-hearted, so unjust, so inhuman, as to leave them famishing with hunger at home, or to encumber strangers with the expense of their maintenance, whilst they themselves are squandering the earnings of a whole week in drinking and gambling abroad ? Alas ! this is but too often the case, though it is the indispensable duty of parents to love their children, and of course not only to provide necessary food and raiment for the support of their bodies, but also to provide for the spiritual welfare and eternal salvation of their immortal souls, as God Himself, the common Father of mankind, provides for our natural subsistence in this life, and for our spiritual and eternal happiness in the next. He has given parents a property in their children which no one has a right to rob them of. They are given to the poor as a valuable treasure, in the place of the perishable wealth of the world ; whilst they have them, they console their afflictions, they lighten the load of worldly distress, they cheer them with future hopes, and by their presence convey such transports of joy to their hearts, that none but unfeeling and unnatural parents can endure their little ones to be wrested and torn from their arms for ever. In consequence of the love that is due to them, mothers, regularly speaking, should suckle their own infants themselves, and preserve them from all dangerous accidents, such as are often occasioned by fire and water, and by being overlaid at night and smothered in their sleep, a remarkable instance of which the Sacred Scripture relates to have happened in the days of King Solomon. Nature teaches even the wild beast the necessity of suckling their young ones, and the example of Sara the mother of Isaac, of Anna the mother of Samuel, and of Mary the Mother of Jesus, should induce Christian mothers to fulfill this office themselves, unless a real necessity, or some weighty reason, may exempt them from it ; and in this case they should be particularly nice in the choice of proper persons to be substituted in their own place, especially as children are so apt to take after their

nurses, and to imbibe with their milk their corporal infirmities and natural dispositions. Hence it is that spiritual writers, as well as natural philosophers, condemn those mothers who, without any just cause, turn their little innocent infants out of doors in a few days after they are born, and abandon part of their own bowels to the care of strange nurses, as if they were divested of the common feelings of nature. But if such parents be reprehensible, how much so are those who in a manner idolize their children, and suffer themselves to be overruled by a passionate fondness and blind inordinate affection for them! They should remember that the love required of them should not be a mere natural love, but a discreet Christian love, tempered with reason and religion, and like unto the love of Abraham for his son Isaac, always kept in due subordination to the love which they owe to the Lord their God, above all things; it should not be partial or confined only to one of their children, but should extend itself to them all in general without exception; for, as St. Ambrose says, nature dictates that as they all have an equal share of their parents' blood, they should share equally in their love without any remarkable difference, especially since a blind predilection of one child above the rest is apt to sow the seeds of discord in families, and to draw the envy, jealousy, and hatred of the other children on him who is visibly cherished, indulged, and preferred to them, as happened to Joseph, the favorite child of the Patriarch Jacob.

The second duty of parents is to instruct their children, according to these words of the Holy Scripture: *If thou hast children, instruct them, and bow down their necks from their childhood*—Eccles. vi. 25. Even before they have arrived at the perfect use of reason, their mouths, hearts, and memories are to be filled with pious and heavenly things, and not, as frequently happens, with idle or immodest songs, nonsense, and fooleries, which serve only to poison their minds and corrupt their hearts. They should be carefully instructed in the rudiments of religion, and the primary articles of faith, concerning the mysteries of the Unity of God, the Trinity of the Divine Persons, the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Fall and Redemption of Mankind, &c. They are to be informed of the end of their creation, and of the indispensable obligation to serve and worship God by faith, hope, charity, and good works. Their parents should look upon themselves as guardians appointed by Almighty God to preserve them in the happy state of their baptismal sanctity, free from the corruption of the world, and out of the reach of its dangerous snares, pomps, and vanities, which they sol-

emuly renounced when they were enrolled amongst the adopted children of Christ ; and therefore, far from instilling the spirit of pride, the love of fine dress, or sentiments of resentment and revenge into their tender minds, they should inspire them with a love of virtue, and a hatred of sin, by laying before them the beauty and loveliness of the one, and the baseness and dreadful consequences of the other. They should make them sensible, that without religion they cannot be truly happy even in this life, nor even become useful members and ornaments of society. These great truths are to be frequently inculcated, that they may sink deep into their minds, and be their safeguard and protection against every danger and temptation which they may have afterward to encounter. Thus it was that the pious mother of St. Louis, king of France, took care to instruct him in his childhood, and had the comfort to see her instructions crowned with wonderful success. The history of her life informs us that she was accustomed to preach the following lesson to him every day : My dear child, though you are the object of my most tender affections, yet I would rather see you stripped of your right to the royal crown and extensive dominions of your illustrious ancestors, and lying dead before my eyes, than see you stripped of the white robe of your baptismal innocence, and defiled with one single mortal sin. In like manner, St. Monica, the devout mother of the great Augustine, made it her constant study and practice to preach the love of God and the duties of religion to him, when yet a child ; and her daily instructions made so deep and so lasting an impression on his mind, that they often recurred afterward when he had the misfortune to deviate from the paths of virtue, and made him so many tacit reproaches, that at length they became one of the happy means that God in His great mercy employed for the conversion of his soul. He tells us in the book of his confessions that he had sucked in the sweet name of Jesus along with his mother's milk, and became so enamored of it in the very midst of his errors, that he could find no taste or relish in the most florid pieces of Cicero's oratory and eloquence, because he did not meet this holy and adorable name mentioned therein. Such are the salutary effects and blessed fruits of early religious instructions given by parents to their children. If, therefore, O Christian parents ! you have your own and your children's salvation at heart, you will instruct them betimes in the love and fear of the Lord ; they are sacred pledges and precious deposits which He has entrusted to your care, and for which you must be accountable if they happen to be lost through your fault, or to perish

eternally through your neglect. Be not deceived, then, cries out St. John Chrysostom ; it is your duty to instruct your children, and to kindle the fire of divine love in their hearts ; your mouths and your lips are their books ; you are their teachers and preachers, their masters and apostles ; you are to conduct yourselves in your respective families like bishops in their dioceses, for you are, like them, charged with the care and tuition of every soul under your jurisdiction. St. Augustine coincides with the aforesaid holy doctor, and says, it is incumbent on you, O fathers and mothers ! to act the part of doctors and preachers in your own houses ; for as it is our duty to announce the word of God to you in the church, so, in like manner, it is your duty to announce it at home to your children and domestics.

The third duty of a parent is to correct and chastise his children when they offend God, as God, on his part, denounces a just punishment against them when they offend and dishonor their parents. *He that spareth the rod, hateth his son*, as the Scripture says (Prov. xiii. 24) ; and again, (Eccles. xxx.) : *He that loveth his son frequently chastiseth him, that he may rejoice in his latter end*. It is also said in the same chapter : *Bow down his neck while he is young, and beat his sides while he is a child, lest he grow stubborn, and regard thee not, and so be a sorrow of heart to thee*. Here is a lesson and warning to those parents who are blind to their children's faults, or who have not resolution enough to give them proper correction when they deserve it. By a just judgment of God, and in punishment of their criminal indulgence, it often happens that those very children whose faults they overlook, and whom they indulge the most, fly afterward in their face, become their heaviest crosses, and greatest scourges, make them feel the smart and pain of their disorderly behavior, and shorten their days by grief and vexation, scandal, shame, and confusion ; for which reason the Scripture says : *A child who is suffered to follow his own will covers his mother with scandal*—Prov. xxix. The sad effects of the neglect of due correction, and of that excessive fondness which is so natural to many parents, that it causes them to connive at the faults and misdemeanors of their children, appeared visibly in Heli, a High Priest in the old law : he had not courage enough to chastise his two wicked sons, Ophni and Phinees, and thereby he drew the vengeance of heaven upon himself, and upon his posterity. He gave them indeed a gentle rebuke, but he did not make use of the authority which he had in quality of their father, and as High Priest, to correct them and put a stop to their impiety ;

wherefore the Lord sent a Prophet to him to denounce the most severe punishments against him, all which were soon literally accomplished, as we read—1 Kings, c. ii. and iii.

Correction to be useful and profitable, must be seasonable, suitable, and proportioned to the fault ; it must be given with great prudence and discretion, with a composed and settled mind, with charity and with a paternal heart, not to gratify a vindictive spirit or the anger of a parent, but to amend and reform the child. *Fathers*, says St. Paul, *bring up your children in the discipline and correction of the Lord*—Ephes. c. vi. v. 4. And again (Coloss. iii. 21) : *Fathers provoke not your children to indignation, lest they be discouraged*. All extremes should be avoided ; for as too much indulgence and lenity are highly pernicious, so too much asperity and harshness are often productive of fatal consequences. To keep children always in terror, to treat them with severity on all occasions, to beat them without mercy and without reason, has more the appearance of hatred than of love, and instead of being serviceable, or producing any good effect, will rather prove detrimental, as it will naturally sour the temper of children, increase their obstinacy, and lessen their esteem and affection for their parents. Passionate correction, that is given in the midst of horrid oaths and imprecations, as often happens, may be compared to a violent storm accompanied with flashes of lightning, claps of thunder, and heavy showers of rain, which only serve to annoy the fruits of the earth ; but as a seasonable and gentle shower is productive of much good, so a moderate correction cannot fail to produce the most salutary effects, when it is given in a Christian manner, with a proper intention, and upon a just and necessary occasion.

Correction is never more necessary than when children approach the years of maturity ; for as their passions grow stronger and increase with their age, and as a thousand temptations and dangerous occasions of seduction present themselves on every side, they never stand more in need of being kept under regular subjection, and of being gradually inured to the practice of self-denial and mortification, both in their will and senses. A zealous parent should, therefore, endeavor to convince them that pleasures which gratify the senses are to be guarded against, and to be used with great fear and moderation. He should be particularly careful to support his own authority, and enforce due obedience to his orders ; he should redouble his vigilance, and observe every vicious turn that they may take, in order to root out the growing evil in time,

and curb their youthful passions as soon as they first begin to make their appearance. In short, he should remove from them, if possible, whatever may contribute to feed the inclinations of corrupt nature, such as vicious companions, dangerous diversions, amorous novels, and all other bad books, which sully the imaginations and poison the ideas of children, and may be justly looked upon as the bane of virtue and the pest of youth. It is to the neglect of such precautions, and to the criminal connivance of an indulgent and careless father, that St. Augustine attributes a great part of the disorders of his youthful days. The briars and thorns of sinful desires, says he, sprung out of the fertile soil of my corrupt nature, and grew higher than my head, and there was no hand to weed them out by due correction. His pious mother, indeed, left nothing undone on her part; but, for want of the father's concurrence, her endeavors proved ineffectual for a long time. His father winked at his immoralities, laughed at his loose expressions, and passed them by with impunity, as the sallies of a sprightly genius. He did not mind whether his son was chaste or lascivious, so that he was but witty and eloquent. Herein he resembled many unhappy parents of our days, who in open violation of their duty, and to the great prejudice and scandal of their children, overlook their impieties, and laugh at their wanton words, jests, and actions. *Laugh not at thy son*, says the Holy Ghost (Eccles. xxx. 10), *lest thou have sorrow, and at the last thy teeth be set on edge.*

There is still another duty that must crown a parent's care, and bring to perfection the good fruits of a Christian education; that is, to give good example to their children, and to offer up their fervent prayers daily to God, that He may vouchsafe to preserve them by His divine grace from all sin and danger, and give them His blessing. Without the blessing of God all other means will prove ineffectual and unsuccessful. *Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it*, says the Royal Prophet—Ps. cxxvi. Let a gardener be ever so assiduous in cultivating and weeding his garden, and in sowing good seed in it, all he does will avail nothing unless it be watered with the dew of heaven; Paul may plant, and Apollo may water, but *it is God that gives the increase*, as the Apostle speaks—I Cor. iii. Parents, therefore, instead of cursing and damning their children, as several frequently do upon the least provocation, and even without any real offense, fought both in their morning and evening prayers to beseech the Giver of all good gifts to bless and preserve them, in imitation of holy

Job, who, as the Scripture relates, rising up early, offered sacrifices and holocausts to God for every one of his children, lest they should have offended God by sin—Job. c. i. v. 5. To give good example to children, by leading virtuous and edifying lives, is the lesson of lessons. This was the important advice that St. Jerome wrote to a Roman lady, who had consulted him upon the education of her daughter : Be careful, said he, to give her no other example but what she may safely follow without offending the Lord her God ; let her be witness to nothing but what may contribute to inspire her with an aversion to sin and a love of virtue ; for to advise a child to one thing, and practice the contrary, is to destroy with one hand what the other hand has taken pains to erect. Hence St. Chrysostom says, in his exposition of the fifth chapter of St. Matthew, pious parents who show their children good example at home, are of more service to them and to their other domestics, than I by all my preaching in the church, because my sermons are either seldom heard or easily forgotten by them ; but the good example of a parent is always before the children's eyes, and cannot but have the greatest influence imaginable upon them. This should make all parents cautious, even to a nicety, what they either say or do in the presence of their children, since it carries so much weight with it.

Thrice happy are the parents who edify and educate their children after this manner ; they shall receive a triple crown for their reward : First, a crown of honor in this life, for a virtuous child is the consolation, joy, satisfaction, and crown of his father, as the Scripture says—Prov. xvii. 6. Secondly, they shall receive a crown of grace, for a virtuous education of children is the cause of their parents' salvation, as St. Paul teaches—1 Tim. ii. Thirdly, they shall receive a crown of glory in heaven, for as the Prophet Daniel assures us, c. xii. v. 3 : Those who instill virtue in many, and instruct them in the science of salvation, shall shine like stars before the throne of God for perpetual eternities. Which is the happiness I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

NEW YEAR'S DAY.

ON THE TRANSCENDENT SANCTITY OF THE NAME
OF JESUS, AND THE HIGH RESPECT
THAT IS DUE TO IT.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| I. Circumcision. | IV. Our duties toward the Sacred |
| II. Sublimity of the Sacred Name. | Name. |
| III. The powers of the Sacred Name. | V. Conclusion. |

Postquam consummati sunt dies octo, ut circumcideretur puer, vocatum est nomen ejus Jesus.—*Luc. c. ii. v. 21.*

When eight days were accomplished, that the Child should be circumcised, His name was called Jesus.—St. Luke, c. ii. v. 21.

In the mystery of this day we behold the Son of God, with the most amazing condescension and profound humility, submitting Himself to the rigorous ceremony of circumcision, and purchasing a right to the venerable name of Jesus, by the effusion of His sacred blood. Circumcision was a seal or sign of the covenant made between God and Abraham in the old law. It was first observed by Abraham, and, as St. Augustine says, was regarded as an outward profession of faith, and a remedy for canceling original sin in the male descendants of Abraham and his posterity, who were thereby distinguished from all other nations, as in the new law Christians are distinguished from all other people by the sacrament of Baptism. Christ our Lord, as the Apostle speaks, being separated from sinners by His innate sanctity and spotless innocence, stood in no need of receiving this mark and character, or of submitting to the severity of a law that was made for sinners; however, as He came not to violate but to fulfill the law, and as heaven and earth were to be reconciled by His sufferings, and the pride and disobedience of our first parents to be expiated by His humiliations and obedience, He vouchsafed to undergo the humiliating and painful operation of the knife of circumcision on the eighth day after He was born. The same boundless and inestimable charity which had induced Him to clothe Himself with the nature of man, and to appear on the day of His nativity in the stable of Bethlehem, under the figure of a poor, forlorn infant, induced Him likewise to put on the livery and appearance of a sinner, and to

charge Himself with our guilt, as soon as He came into the world. He would not wait until the time of His passion and death on Mount Calvary, where He was to shed His sacred blood more copiously for our sake, even to the very last drop, but He was willing to commence the great work of our redemption at the very beginning of His mortal life, almost as soon as He came into the world, to show that He was the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world, and to satisfy the justice of the offended Deity, by substituting himself a victim of infinite value and dignity in the place of fallen man. No less a price was required for man's redemption, and for canceling the sins of the world, than His precious blood, and this price He designed to pay in full on the altar of the cross; but He was pleased to advance an earnest on part of this great ransom at an earlier period, by presenting the first fruits and drops of His blood to His eternal Father in the mystery of this day. Thus He sanctified the first day of the new year, giving us at the same time a pledge of his love, and publicly professing himself to be the Saviour of mankind; for it was upon this occasion that he took the august name of Jesus, which signifies *a Saviour*, as is evident from the orders which the Angel of the Lord, sent down from heaven, communicated to St. Joseph: *Joseph, Son of David, said he, fear not to take Mary thy spouse, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. She shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.*

Such an overflowing and wonderful excess of his infinite mercy, calls upon us this day for the most grateful acknowledgment, and should engage us to engrave on our hearts the sweet name of *Jesus* in the deepest characters of love; it should animate us at the beginning of this new year to imitate his corporal circumcision, by a spiritual circumcision of our hearts, whereof the legal circumcision was but a type and figure, according to the Apostle, Rom. ii. 28. In short, whenever we hear the sacred name of *Jesus* pronounced, the very sound of it should inspire us with respect, love and gratitude, as it calls to our remembrance all the benefits he has conferred upon us, and expresses the whole work of our redemption in two syllables. To excite you, therefore, to the like tender feelings and pious sentiments, and to impress your minds with a salutary abhorrence and aversion to the impious practice of profaning and abusing this blessed name by the most dreadful oaths, imprecations, and blasphemies, is the design of the following discourse. The transcendent sanctity, virtue, and excellence of the name of *Jesus* shall

be the subject of the first point ; the high respect and veneration that is due to the name of Jesus shall be the subject of the second point. Let us, as usual, invoke the intercession of the Blessed Mother of Jesus, greeting her with the Angel, *Ave Maria*.

The Holy Scripture relating to the noble exploits of the valiant Eleazer, in the sixth chapter of the first book of Machabees, says, that he delivered himself up as a victim, in order to raise his people, and acquire an immortal name. These words are ascribed to our Saviour by the Church in her Divine Office, and justly, for, as St. Paul speaks in his epistle to the Philippians, ch. ii. : *He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death ; for which cause God also hath exalted him, and hath given him a name which is above all names, that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those that are in Heaven, on earth, and under the earth*. It was in recompense of His profound humiliations that the Eternal Father, who alone knew what title was the most suitable to the sacred character and dignity of His beloved Son, gave Him the excellent name of *Jesus*, a name of majesty, triumph, and glory : a name of sanctity and salvation ; a name of mercy and love ; a name of sweetness and heavenly comfort ; a name of power and strength ; a name that the angels in heaven incessantly praise and glorify ; a name that the Church here on earth holds in the highest esteem and veneration ; a name that strikes fear and terror into the infernal spirits who reside in the very lowest regions of hell. It is no wonder, then, that the spouse in the Canticles compares the name of her beloved to oil, because, as oil swims above all other liquids, so the name of *Jesus*, the beloved bridegroom of our souls, is above all other names. It is also the property of oil to heal, to nourish, and to give light. It serves for a medicine, for food, and for light, says St. Bernard. In like manner, the name of *Jesus* is a medicine that heals the wound of the soul. It is a food that nourishes pious and chaste affections in the heart. It is a light that illumines the understanding and inflames the will. At the light of this name, all clouds are scattered, gloomy thoughts vanish away, peace and joy appear, and serenity is restored to the mind. By this food our weakness is strengthened, and our wearied spirits are recruited. All food of the soul seems insipid, unless it be seasoned with this salt. It is dry, says St. Bernard, unless this oil be poured on it. The holy martyrs and champions of religion were anointed with this oil, says St. Ambrose, and were thereby rendered invincible and victorious in spite of all the attempts of cruelty and malice.

It was by the virtue of the holy name of Jesus that the Apostles overthrew the empire of Satan, destroyed paganism, abolished superstition, converted nations, and established Christianity upon the ruins of the Jewish synagogue. It was in this name that they defeated the princes of darkness, cast out devils, and wrought numberless prodigies. It was in this name, as Christ foretold them, that they healed the sick, cured the dumb, the deaf, and the blind, and raised the dead to life. Not to produce a great variety of instances of this truth recorded in Holy Writ, the third chapter of the Acts of the Apostles furnish us with a very illustrious example, for we read there that as St. Peter and St. John were going upon a certain day to the temple of Jerusalem to prayers, a poor cripple, who had been lame from his mother's womb, being carried to the gate of the temple, according to his usual custom, in order to beg the charitable assistance of those who came to offer up their prayers and sacrifices there to the Lord, and seeing the two Apostles passing by, he humbly craved an alms from them : whereupon St. Peter, fixing his eyes on him, immediately replied : Silver and gold I have none, but what I have this I give thee : In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk. And accordingly St. Peter had no sooner expressed these words, but the poor cripple stood up in an instant, and followed him into the temple, leaping with joy, and praising God in the presence of a multitude of people, who were amazed to see so conspicuous a miracle wrought before their eyes, by virtue of the name of *Jesus*. The stiff-necked Jews indeed were confounded hereat, and threatened the Apostles severely, charging them most strictly not to preach or teach any more in that name. But this only served to fire their zeal, and animate them to preach with greater confidence. Nay, the very name of *Jesus* inspired them with such courage and intrepidity, that, as the Scripture informs us, after they had been publicly scourged, by order of the Jewish Council, they departed, rejoicing to find that they were thought worthy to suffer contumely for the name of *Jesus*.

This is the name that prostrated Saul on the road to Damascus, and changed him from a Jew into a Christian, from a persecutor into a preacher, from a sinner into a saint, from an enemy of the cross into a zealous disciple, and an indefatigable apostle. This is the name that he was ordered to carry before the Gentiles, the kings of the earth, and the children of Israel. This is the name wherein he gloried so much, and which he seems to have taken a particular pleasure and delight in repeating frequently in his epistles, even where it might appear to be

superfluous. It was the wonderful virtue of this name that sweetened all his sufferings and apostolic labors, and inspired him with undaunted courage, when he appeared before the tribunals of the most barbarous tyrants. It was it also that rendered the stones so welcome to St. Stephen, the cross so precious to St. Andrew, the gridiron so pleasant to St. Laurence, and the wheel so acceptable to St. Catherine. It is related in the lives of several other saints, that the very sound of the holy name of *Jesus* replenished their hearts with divine love, spiritual joy and consolation ; which made St. Bernard say, that *Jesus* is honey in the mouth, music in the ear, and jubilation in the heart of a pious Christian. We read of St. Francis of *Assisium*, that his heart was filled with an inexpressible sweetness whenever he invoked it, or heard it pronounced with due respect ; and St. Augustine tells us in his confessions, that the florid eloquence of Tully, with which he had been much delighted before his conversion, began immediately after to appear dry and insipid to him, because he did not meet with the sweet name of *Jesus* in his writings. St. Francis of Sales says, in a letter which he wrote to a devout person : “ I have not time to write any thing but the great name of salvation, *Jesus*. O what sweetness would this name diffuse in our souls, did we but pronounce it devoutly from our hearts. But I cannot express what I mean by pronouncing this holy name. To speak of it, or to express it worthily, a person should have a tongue of fire.” Another great servant of God cries out with ecstasy : “ O Divine *Jesus*, on Thee depends my happiness, my life, and my death. Whatever I do shall be done in Thy name. If I watch, *Jesus* shall be before my eyes. If I sleep, I will close my eyes, breathing the pure love of *Jesus*. If I walk, it shall be in the sweet company of *Jesus*. If I pray, *Jesus* shall animate my prayers. If I am sick, *Jesus* shall be my physician and my comforter. If I die, it is in the bosom of *Jesus*, who is my life, that I hope to die. *Jesus* shall be my tomb, and His name and cross shall be my epitaph.” As for the devout St. Bernard, he seems to be always in raptures, when he speaks of the sacred name of *Jesus*. If any one be overwhelmed with sadness, says this holy Doctor, if he be oppressed with the heavy load of sin, or finds himself on the brink of perdition, and in danger of being dashed against the rock of despair, let him call *Jesus* to his mind, and he shall be relieved and fortified. Let *Jesus* not depart from his mouth ; let *Jesus* not depart from his heart ; let him raise up his eyes to Heaven with confidence, and devoutly cry out to *Jesus* to save him, as Peter did when he was

sinking under the waves of the sea, and he shall be saved, according to these words of the Scripture, *Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved*—Rom. x. 13. St. Peter assures us, in c. iv. of the Acts of the Apostles, v. 12, that *there is no other name under Heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved*, but the name of Jesus. It is for this reason that it is so frequently invoked in the administration of the holy sacraments, and in the exorcisms and divine office of the Church. Our prayers and supplications to Heaven are also generally concluded with this sacred name, in hopes that they will become the more acceptable, and the more efficacious, according to the promise of Christ himself, in c. xiv. v. 13, of St. John, where he says, *Whatsoever you shall ask the Father in My name, He will grant it to you*. His blessed name is the weapon with which the Church arms her children in the article of death, that they may come off victorious in the day of battle, and be able to bid defiance to Satan, as David formerly did to Goliath, saying: You come armed with a sword, a spear, and a shield, to encounter me, but I come to you in the name of the Lord. The name of *Jesus* is frequently sounded in their ears on their death bed, and their departing souls are sent forth out of this world in His name, in order to strengthen their faith, animate their hope, and inflame their charity, at that awful moment when they are to be presented before the divine tribunal.

Must we not then, my brethren, be void of all piety and religion, if we do not pay due respect to this most holy name, which we can never sufficiently honor? With what confidence shall those sinners invoke it at their dying hour, who during the course of their life make it their daily practice to dishonor and abuse it by the most scandalous oaths and blasphemies? Have they not reason to apprehend that, instead of feeling any comfort, or reaping any benefit in this last agony by crying out, *Lord, Lord!* and invoking that blessed name, which they now most impiously profane, they will perhaps be suffered to expire with some customary oath or blasphemy in their mouths, like unto the blaspheming thief on Mount Calvary, who, by a just judgment of God, was permitted to die in his sins, and descend from the temporal punishment of the cross into the eternal flames of hell! For can any thing be more insolent, more audacious, or more provoking to the supreme majesty of God, than to be thus insulted and abused by the sacrilegious tongues of His own creatures, for whom He has nothing but sentiments of love and tenderness! Can any thing be more ungrateful than to fly thus in the face

of their most bountiful benefactor at the very time that He is showering down His favors and blessings on them? Do they not justly deserve to be abandoned by Him at the hour of death, who abandon Him in their lifetime, and to be then refused that mercy which they now abuse as an encouragement to sin? Though our hearts were supposed to be constantly employed in loving our Lord *Jesus Christ*, and our tongues incessantly occupied in praising and glorifying His name, yet we would still fall infinitely short of the love, respect, and veneration we owe Him. The Scripture teaches us, that in His name every knee should bend, and every tongue should proclaim His glory. At the sound of it the angels adore, and the very devils themselves tremble; and shall the most noble part of the creation on earth be so perverse as to treat it with irreverence and contempt? Alas! this is so often the case, that the Lord Himself complains hereof, through the mouth of the Prophet *Isaias* (c. lii. v. 5), where He says: My name is continually blasphemed from morning till night, from the rising to the setting of the sun. The contagion has at length become so general, that the very public streets frequently resound with the loud thunder of the most tremendous oaths and blasphemies, proceeding from the mouths not only of professed libertines, but also of the people of fashion, of the heads of families, and even the very sex which modesty should characterize. They are neither afraid nor ashamed to bring down the sacred name of *Jesus* upon every frivolous occasion, and to make it the subject of every senseless exclamation, so that as He was formerly scourged with the rods of the Jews, He is now-a-days, according to the remark of St. Augustine, daily and hourly scourged with the blaspheming tongues of many, who undeservedly bear the name and character of Christians. But unless they avert the wrath of Heaven by a timely and sincere conversion, the day will come when they shall wish they had been born dumb, and that their lips had been closed for ever, rather than to have opened them to their eternal perdition, like unto the beast mentioned in c. xiii. of the Apocalypse, which was cast into a pool of fire and sulphur, because it had opened its mouth in blasphemies against God and His saints.

It is the duty of every Christian, who has any regard for the honor and glory of God, to discountenance this odious vice, as far as lies in His power, and to pay a religious respect and veneration to the holy name of *Jesus*, as often as he hears it profaned. It is to inculcate this duty, to kindle the devotion of the faithful to His name, to banish the wicked practice of swearing and blaspheming from all Christian families.

that the Church celebrates a particular festival and office every year in honor of the venerable name of *Jesus*, and grants so many indulgences to those who bow their head respectfully on hearing it pronounced, or who recite with devotion the Litany of that sacred name, or who repeat the words, *praised be Jesus Christ for evermore. Amen.* The Church, in fine, zealously exhorts all her children, at this time, in the words of St. Paul, saying (Coloss. c. iii. v. 17) : *Whatsoever you do in word and in work, all things do ye in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him.* In displaying the mystery of this day, she calls upon them to renounce all impiety and worldly desires ; to cast off the works of darkness, and to live soberly, justly, and piously ; to mortify their unruly passions, and to circumcise the inordinate desires and affections of their hearts. Without this inward circumcision, and spiritual mortification of the heart and the passions, the external circumcision, or mortification of the body, will avail but little. Before all things God is to be adored in spirit and truth. Our interior must be reformed, and our inordinate affections must be retrenched and cut off by self denial. This is the distinguishing character of the disciples of Christ in the new law, as the legal circumcision was a distinctive mark in the old law of the true Israelites and children of Abraham, which made St. Paul say (Galat. v. 24), that *they that are Christ's have crucified their flesh with the vices and concupiscences.* We cannot, therefore, my brethren, begin the new year better than by joining the internal worship and homage of our hearts with the external worship, and divesting ourselves of the old man, with all his deeds, in order to put on Jesus Christ, and begin the year in His name, referring all that we do in the course of it to God's honor and glory. The old year is now expired, and we are entering into a new one. Thus it is that our years pass over without interruption, and the fleeting moments continually fly from us never more to return. Each instant we approach our last end. Every step we take brings us nearer to the grave, and we are hastening as fast as the wings of time can carry us toward the immense gulf of eternity. This present year will be perhaps the last year of our life, and I sincerely wish it may prove a happy year to you all, in the most Christian sense of the word ; but to render it such as I wish it, depends on yourselves, and on the measures which you now take to redeem the past time that you have misspent, and to expiate the sins that you have heretofore committed. The foregoing year has put a period to the lives of thousands, who are now lying in their graves,

though at the commencement of it they were as likely to live as those they have left behind them, and as the very youngest and most healthful person in this congregation. What has happened them may happen us, since there is no fence or security against death. Many of them might be now happy souls in heaven had they but reformed their lives, and began to pursue a Christian line of conduct a year ago. They were exhorted to it, as I now exhort you. They were forewarned of the danger of putting off their conversion, as I now forewarn you ; but presuming that they had the prospect of many happy years before them, they neglected the means of salvation, and continued in their sinful disorders until they were suddenly cut off the face of the earth, and hurried in a state of impenitence to the awful tribunal of divine justice. Their misfortune should be a warning to us all to begin this year well, and to make good use of our time, before the night of death overtakes us. In imitation of the royal prophet (Ps. lxxvi. v. 6.), we should *never lose sight of the years of eternity*, but begin in time to store up a provision of good works against the last and tremendous hour, which is to decide whether we are to be happy or unhappy for ever and ever.

O Father of mercies, and God of all consolation, we return Thee thanks for all Thy favors and blessings which thou hast conferred on us, and particularly for having hitherto spared us, and brought us safe to the beginning of this new year. May Thy holy name be blessed and praised for ever. We resolve, with Thy assistance, to begin from this hour to love and serve Thee with new fervor and zeal, and to endeavor to satisfy Thee for the long arrears of love and service which we owe Thy infinite goodness. Hear not, we beseech Thee, the voice of our past iniquities, which cry aloud to Heaven for vengeance ; but hear the voice of Thy beloved Son's blood, which cries still louder to Heaven for mercy, and demands forgiveness for all repenting sinners. O may the tears which trickle down from His sacred eyes plead our pardon and efface our sins. May His infinite merits sanctify all our undertakings the ensuing year, and render them acceptable in Thy sight. And thou, O Divine Jesus, be unto us a Jesus. Put Thy name as a signet upon our hearts, and fill us with that reverential awe, respect, and love which are due to Thy Sovereign Majesty, that after honoring and serving Thee faithfully here on earth, and following Thee as our model and our guide, we may enjoy Thee hereafter, as the author, the source, and the object of our everlasting happiness. *Amen.*

ON THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. The mercy and justice of Christ.
- II. History of the Magi.
- III. Lessons to be drawn from the faith of the Magi.
- IV. The repudiation of the Jews and the election of the Gentiles a warning to Christians.
- V. Peroration.

Vidimus stellam ejus in Oriente, et venimus adorare cum —*St. Matt. c. ii. v. 2.*

We have seen His star in the East, and are come to adore Him.—*St. Matt. c. ii. v. 2.*

IN the mystery of this day, which is called the *Epiphany*, or manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we behold two of the principle attributes of God clearly displayed; I mean His boundless mercy and His strict justice; His mercy in regard of the Gentiles, whom He was graciously pleased to call to the light of faith, in the person of the three *Magi*, or wise men of the East; and His justice with regard to the Jews, whom He rejected in the person of Herod, and the rulers of that incredulous nation. The Messiah, the hope and expectation of Israel, came at length at the time, and in the place foretold by the Prophets, and behold three sages or wise men, commonly styled kings, conducted by a new and miraculous star, seek Him, find Him, recognize Him, prostrate themselves before Him, adore Him, and having opened their treasures, offered Him presents of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, whilst the king and people of the holy city of Jerusalem were disturbed at the news of His birth, and stood astonished and confounded. Such is the grand and profound secret of divine mercy and justice, hidden from all eternity in the bosom of God, and manifested on this occasion in the vocation of the Gentiles, and in the reprobation of the Jews. But what instruction shall we draw from a truth so consoling on the one hand, and terrifying on the other? The same that St. Paul does, when, after treating divinely of this important subject in his epistle to the Romans, he concludes with these memorable words, *See: therefore, the goodness and severity of God*; His goodness toward the Gentiles, which He has extended to us, who are their descendants and successors, and His severity toward

the Jews, which He will extend also to us if we imitate them; we should, therefore, gratefully acknowledge the goodness of God, and awfully dread his severity. His mercy, which shines so bright in the mystery of this day in favor of the Gentiles, who were graciously called after having been abandoned so long, should penetrate us with the deepest sense of gratitude; and His justice, which exerts itself with such rigor against the Jews, who were abandoned, after having been sought and cherished so long, should inspire us with a salutary fear. Behold, my dear brethren, two reflections, that form the division of the following discourse, and appear most suitable to the great mystery that the Gospel of this day relates. Let us, before we proceed to develop it, prostrate ourselves, like the wise men of the East, before our new-born Redeemer, and devoutly implore the Divine aid, through the intercession of the ever Blessed Virgin, greeting her with the words of the Angel, *Ave Maria*.

The Gospel informs us, that Jesus being born in Bethlehem in Judea in the days of King Herod, certain sages or wise men came from the east of Jerusalem, inquiring where the King of the Jews was born. They are generally understood to have been men in high dignity, nurtured in idolatry, and confirmed in superstition, by instruction, by example, and by habit. The first effect of God's mercy to them was, the apparition of an extraordinary constellation, which illuminated their hemisphere, and served them for a guide, as the luminous cloud had served the children of Israel for a guide in the desert. The second favor conferred on them was at Jerusalem, where they learned the sense of the Sacred Scripture, by the ministry of the lawful doctors of the Jewish synagogue, and were informed by them of the particular place where the promised Messiah was to be born; and the third grace they were favored with was at Bethlehem, where the Saviour of the World, whom they came to adore in His infancy, revealed Himself to them as a light destined to enlighten the Gentiles, of whom they were the first fruits, and as I may say, the progenitors of Christianity, since it was by them, and in them, that our vocation and salvation began, as we were called, through them, to the light of the Gospel and of the true saving faith. The star of Jacob, the sign of the promised Messiah, appeared to them, and they obeyed its dictates without demur, and set out in search of Him, though separated by an immense tract of country. *We have seen His star in the East*, said they, *and we are come to adore Him*. Persuaded by the inward light of faith, which began then by its

rays to illumine the eyes of their souls, and to disperse the darkness of infidelity, wherein they had been immersed, that the star which had appeared over their heads, and directed its course toward Judea, was something supernatural and divine, sent from above to instruct them where they should seek the King of the Jews, who was already the object of their most ardent desires, and who was shortly to become the object of their most profound adorations, they bid defiance to every obstacle, and answered the call of Heaven in spite of every opposition. Their faith was so heroic, so prompt, so sincere, and so persevering, that it determined them to quit their native country, to renounce the superstitious errors in which they had been brought up, and to pay their homage to a God made man, and promised for so many elapsed ages by the oracles of Heaven. Far from being swayed by motives of worldly prudence, or deterred by the apparent difficulties and dangers of a long and tedious journey, through deserts and mountains almost impassible, they set out in the midst of a rigorous season, in the very depth of winter, from their brilliant courts and magnificent palaces, attracted by the inward grace that spoke to their hearts, and following the blazing meteor that spoke to their eyes, and guided them, until they at length arrived in Jerusalem, the capital of Judea. On arriving there they might have reasonably supposed that they were come to their journey's end, but they found themselves disappointed, and seemingly forsaken by Heaven, the star which had served them as a guide to that royal city having suddenly disappeared from their eyes ; however, this trial was not sufficient to induce them to abandon their design, or to lay aside their determined resolution to seek the Redeemer of their souls until they had the happiness to find Him ; cost what it would, they were resolved to spare no pains, and to leave nothing untried, until they were blessed with the sight of Jesus Christ, and paid Him a tribute of their homage ; and since the Lord was pleased to try their perseverance, by depriving them of the sight of the heavenly messenger, and of the extraordinary means of information, they thought it incumbent on them to have recourse to the common and ordinary means, that is to say, to the advice and direction of the Jewish Priests, who were appointed by God to be the spiritual guides of His people, and who, though unworthy of their ministry, did not cease to sit in the chair of Moses, and to be the true depositories of religion and the lawful interpreters of the Holy Scriptures. The great Council of the Jewish nation, and the Priests and Doctors of the Law, being therefore convened and consulted on

this occasion, they replied that Bethlehem was the place which, according to the Prophets, was to be honored with the birth of the Messiah. The three wise men acquiesce and submit to their doctrine with the same docility as if God Himself had spoken to them. The bad example of the Jewish Priests did not hinder them from believing the great truths which they announced to the people from the chair of truth, because the truths and maxims of religion do not depend on the morals of those who teach and preach them, but spring from a higher source, that is, from the wisdom and veracity of God Himself, who knows how to teach and instruct His people, even by the mouth of impious ministers and unworthy ecclesiastics.

Jerusalem was thrown into confusion by the news of the arrival of the wise men, yet Jerusalem was not inclined to follow their example : it saw strangers come from the confines of the East to make a tender of their allegiance to the King of the Jews, yet it did not think of paying homage to its own Sovereign, although so near its gates. These foreigners made all Jerusalem resound with this important question : *Where is the King of the Jews?* They even entered the very court of Herod himself with undaunted courage and intrepidity ; fearless of all danger, and disregarding the indignation of a jealous tyrant, and the censures, contempt and derisions of his subjects, they zealously cried out and said, *We have seen His star in the East, and are come to adore Him.* This made one of the holy Fathers address them by the following apostrophe : O wise Philosophers ! O skillful Astronomers ! who, laying aside all human respect in the presence of a most cruel king, already infamous for bloodshed, have generously exposed yourselves, and publicly confessed and given glory to Jesus Christ, the King of Kings, without the least disguise or dissimulation ! Having departed from Jerusalem on their way to Bethlehem, the Lord, to encourage their faith and zeal, and to direct their travels, was pleased to show them again the very star which they had seen in the East, and made it march before them till it conducted them to the place where Jesus was, and then it ceased to advance, giving them thereby to understand that this was the happy term of their voyage, and that they had only to enter in order to find the precious treasure, which they thirsted after with so much ardor, and had sought with so much care and diligence. The holy men, therefore, entered the poor cottage in transports of spiritual joy, and having found the Divine Babe, with His Mother, they cast their royal crowns and sceptres at His feet ; they fell on their

knees and prostrated themselves in His presence ; they adored Him as their Lord, their God, and their King, and in acknowledgment of His divinity, humanity and royalty, they offered Him their mystical presents of incense, myrrh, and gold.

We read in the third book of Kings, c. x., that when the Queen of Saba, on hearing the fame of Solomon's great wisdom, came from the East to Jerusalem in order to see him, she admired the royal magnificence of his palace, and was astonished at the pomp and grandeur that surrounded his majesty on every side ; but the three sages, or Kings of the East, found the King of Kings in a situation very different from that of Solomon. His palace was a low despicable stable ; His throne was a manger ; His bed was a little hay or straw ; His whole retinue consisted of Mary and Joseph ; His guards were an ox and an ass. In this humble condition they beheld Him, divested of every visible mark of grandeur, ensign of royalty, and appearance of divinity. Far, however, from being shocked or scandalized hereat ; far from staggering in their faith, or judging by such outward appearances, they believed and confessed Him under this humble disguise to be the God of all glory. For this reason, besides the outward presents they made Him, they poured forth their souls in His presence in the deepest sense of praise, thanksgiving, charity, devotion, and a total sacrifice of themselves, which He undoubtedly repaid by favors of a much greater excellency, as He presented them with the special gifts of grace. How many instructive lessons does the conduct of these three eastern wise men afford us, my brethren ! Should we not, like them, draw near in spirit to the infant Jesus, and make Him a tender of our hearts, particularly on this great solemnity ? Should we not, like them, offer Him the acceptable presents, first of charity, which is the most excellent of all virtues, as gold is the most precious of all metals ; secondly, of devotion, which like a sweet incense, rises and ascends to His throne : and thirdly, of mortification, which preserves the soul from the corruption of sin, as myrrh preserves the bodies of the dead which are embalmed with it ? Not content with an exterior and superficial adoration, we ought to adore Jesus Christ in spirit and truth, and return thanks to His infinite mercy, for having graciously called us in the persons of the three wise men, to the light of faith, and the worship of the true God. Our ancestors, like unto their ancestors, were heretofore immersed in ignorance, and involved in the darkness of infidelity. Our country, like unto the East, where they lived, was once overspread with Pagan-

ism, and inhabited by a people, bewildered and blinded with the gross errors of idolatry, until God in His great mercy vouchsafed to look down upon them, and upon us with compassion, and to bring us over to the wonderful light of divine faith, by the splendor of His bright luminary and glorious apostle, St. Patrick. If, therefore, we are not Turks, Mahometans, Pagans, or Jews ; if we are Christians and Catholics, it is because the Lord has been graciously pleased to manifest and reveal Himself to us, and to invite us to the inheritance of His heavenly kingdom ; it is because Jesus Christ made His star shine over us, and conferred on us graces similar to those which he conferred on the wise men of the East. To His pure mercy we are indebted for the signal blessing and inestimable benefit of our vocation. He has vouchsafed to incorporate us in the communion of saints, and to raise us to the dignity of His adoptive children at our spiritual birth by baptism, even before we opened the eyes of our souls to the first dawn of reason. He has placed us within the pale, and in the bosom of His Holy Catholic Church, in preference to thousands of others, who perhaps would serve Him with more fidelity. In this Church there is a perpetual and uninterrupted succession of lawful pastors, whose duty it is to guide the Israel of God, or to govern and instruct his people, as it is our duty to hear and obey them in all matters concerning faith and morals. When any difficulties arise about the sense and meaning of the Sacred Scriptures, we are to observe what was practiced by the wise men in Jerusalem, and to submit without opposition to the authority and decisions of the pastors and bishops of the Church. This is an invariable rule that preserves unity in faith, and prevents us, as the Apostle speaks, from being tossed to and fro like children, by every blast of human opinions and new-fangled religions. In this Church also, Jesus Christ imparts His graces through the channel of the holy sacraments, which He instituted for the sanctification of our souls. Here, as in a mystical Bethlehem, He is spiritually born, found, and adored. Here He forms Himself in our hearts, according to the expression of the Apostles, and He is adored on our altars. Here He absolves the repenting sinners, who are conducted by the star of His grace to the sacred tribunal of penance. Here He nourishes the souls of the faithful in the holy communion with the bread of Angels, and the heavenly manna of His own precious body and blood, not in a type or figure, but in substance and reality, veiled under the sacramental forms in the venerable Eucharist : so that by receiving it with the proper dispositions, our souls become a

kind of happy Bethlehem here on earth, wherein Jesus Christ Himself, the source and author of all grace, is as it were newly born, and communicates His heavenly favors and blessings in abundance. Such an effusion of divine mercy, such an excess of charity, calls loudly upon us for the most grateful acknowledgment, and for the most faithful correspondence with the graces bestowed on us by the Lord our God. If in imitation of the three wise men, or Kings of the East, we follow the guidance of the star of grace, and continue to march forward in the straight paths of virtue to the end of our mortal pilgrimage, we may confidently hope to be at length conducted with safety into the charming mansions of eternal bliss, where the Son of God is seated on a throne of glory, in all the splendor of majesty, encompassed with millions of Angels, and adored by all the Saints of the Church triumphant. But if, instead of copying after the noble example that the wise men of the East have set us, we unfortunately resemble Herod and the stiff-necked Jews, we may expect to share in their misfortunes, and to be convinced by woful experience of the dire effect of God's severe justice. This reflection leads me to the second point of this discourse, and the remaining part of the mystery of this day.

As a star was the divine messenger that announced the Nativity of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles of the East, so an Angel with a choir of heavenly spirits, was the ambassador that announced it first to the shepherds and people of Judea. Herod, and all Jerusalem with him, was alarmed and disturbed at His birth, instead of rejoicing at the happy tidings, and singing canticles of praise to the Lord, for causing the heavens to rain down the just man, as the Scripture expresses it, and the earth to produce the Saviour of mankind; the ambitious King erroneously imagining that the Messiah, who was then expected by the generality of that carnal people, under the notion of a temporal prince, was come to deprive him of his earthly kingdom, considered Him as a rival, who was to dispute with him the throne he had usurped. Being, therefore, much agitated and perplexed in his mind, he had recourse to his usual arts of craft and dissimulation, and formed the cruel design of taking away the life of the Divine Infant, and sacrificing Him to his restless ambition. This made St. Augustine cry out and say, What will the tribunal of Jesus Christ not do when He shall come with great power and majesty to judge both the living and the dead, if His very crib in the stable of Bethlehem, when he came to be judged, struck such a terror into the proud and haughty King Herod? The tyrant con-

cealed his malicious design under the specious pretext of going himself in person to pay homage to the new born King of the Jews ; for this reason, when he dismissed the wise men from Jerusalem, he gave them a strict charge to return to him after they had found out the Child Jesus, and inform him where He was, that he might also go and adore Him ; but God, who saw his hypocrisy, baffled his wicked projects, by admonishing the wise men not to return any more to him, but to take another road into their own country. It is true, indeed, what Herod projected then the Jews executed afterward, and thereby sealed their own reprobation. They despised the oracles of Heaven, and rejected the Messiah who had been especially promised to their forefathers ; they were unwilling He should reign over them, and blindly preferred the tyrannical dominion of Herod to the sweet yoke of His Gospel. It is no wonder, then, that they ceased to be the chosen people of God ; no wonder that, after thus frustrating the designs of His mercy, they felt the severe effects of His justice, and in their turn were rejected and cast off like abortives, in punishment of their obstinacy and perverseness, and on account of their infidelity in not corresponding with the graces which were offered to them. The very priests and doctors in their synagogue, who had instructed the three wise men of the East, and directed them to Jesus Christ, did not profit by their own instructions, nor avail themselves of that favorable opportunity to seek Him in person, and march at the head of the citizens of Jerusalem, as they should have done, to the place of His birth, which they had pointed out to strangers and foreigners. They shut their eyes against the light which they held out to others, and were such slaves to their passions, and so devoted to the world, and its corrupt maxims, and sinful pleasures, that they would give no admittance to their hearts to the humility of the Messiah, who came not to bestow worldly honors, riches or pleasures on His followers, but to subdue their pride, and enrich their souls with heavenly gifts and graces. The synagogue was therefore repudiated ; the kingdom of God was taken from the Jews, and given to another nation inhabited by Gentiles, according to these words of Scripture—Matt. c. viii. v. 11. *Many shall come from the East and the West, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of Heaven, but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into the exterior darkness.*

It was in the mystery of this great festival this prediction first began to be verified, to the eternal confusion of Herod and the Jewish nation, whose misfortune should serve as a warning to all sinners not to imitate

their example, by rejecting the calls of Heaven, and slighting the favorable opportunities that the Father of Mercies offers them to work their salvation. Yet, alas ! how many followers have they now-a-days, in the very midst of Christianity, who choose rather to remain in the darkness of infidelity, error and vice, than yield to the impressions of grace, and follow the guidance of the star that would bring them to the true light ? In their hearts they are enemies to the spiritual kingdom of Jesus Christ, blush at the humility of His cross, and by their actions, if not their words, cry out like the people mentioned in ch. xix. of St Luke, v. 14 : *We will not have this man to reign over us ;* worse in some measure than Herod himself, who under the pretext of adoring the Son of God, sought an opportunity to take away His life ; they *crucify Him afresh* by their horrid impieties and reiterated crimes, and *are guilty* of abusing His *body and blood* in the blessed sacrament, whenever they receive it unworthily, under the mask of piety and the outward appearance of devotion. If Herod sacrificed thousands of holy innocents to his ambition, they sacrifice thousands of innocent victims to their brutal lusts and insatiable passions. Herod only killed the bodies of the infants that were slaughtered by his orders, and deprived them of a short transitory life ; his malice, far from hurting their immortal souls, was rather of service to them, as it served, even contrary to the tyrant's intention, to accelerate their real and eternal happiness, and to entitle them to the immediate possession of the laurel of martyrdom and life everlasting ; but on the other hand, impious Christians, wicked fathers and mothers, profligate and scandalous sinners, murder and destroy the souls of all those whom they scandalize, and are the means of leading astray, by their bad example and advice, and may be justly styled the unhappy instruments of their spiritual ruin and eternal damnation. Behold, my brethren, the subject of the tears and lamentations of our holy mother, the Church ; this is what renders her inconsolable, like another Rachel, bewailing the loss and reprobation of so many of her refractory children, who are so unfortunate as to shut their ears and harden their hearts against her salutary admonitions.

It is the general opinion of spiritual writers, that of all the inhabitants of the East, the three kings, or wise men, were the only three that were chosen to be the first predestined of the Gentiles, because they were the only three that we find to have followed the guidance of the star. It undoubtedly called them all to the light of faith, and was seen by many other nations of the East : but the generality of the

people contented themselves with gazing upon it, and admiring its uncommon brightness, without taking any pains to seek Him whom that star announced and preached to them ; hence they died in their infidelity, whilst a small number that answered the divine call was ranked amongst the elect ; so true it is, that *many are called, but few are chosen*, because few are faithful in corresponding with the graces of God ; few are as attentive as they ought to be to those gracious lights and divine inspirations which invite and call upon them to enter into the narrow road, that leads to the possession of Jesus Christ and the enjoyment of life everlasting. In short, few imitate the promptitude, the active and undaunted zeal and steadiness of the three wise men. Sinners in general abuse the goodness of God, despise the riches of His mercy, and put off their conversion from day to day, thus exposing themselves to the danger of being deprived of the favors of Heaven in just punishment of their indolence, sloth, and perverseness. We should not be dismayed, my brethren, in the pursuit of virtue, nor disconcerted at the trials and obstacles we may happen to meet, but courageously surmount all the difficulties that seem to obstruct our pious enterprise. If we have the misfortune to lose Jesus and His grace, by falling into sin, we are to seek Him without delay ; we are to fly to the mystical Bethlehem of the Church, and search for Him with diligence and perseverance in the asylum of mercy, in the sacred tribunal of penance. One star was sufficient to instruct, persuade, and convert the wise men of the East ; and should not the many stars of grace that we are favored with, suffice to persuade us to a proper sense of our duty ? The good examples of piety and religion which, notwithstanding the deplorable depravity of the age, we have continually before our eyes ; the edifying sermons and exhortations, that are frequently preached to us from the chair of truth ; the books of piety that we read ; the wholesome counsels and advices that are charitably given to us ; the good thoughts, inward remorses of conscience, and secret inspirations that we perceive in our souls, are as many lights and stars of vocation that invite and solicit us to renounce our evil ways, to quit our vicious habits, to depart from the broad road of perdition, and to re-enter the paths of virtue. When, like the three wise men of the East, we have the comfort and happiness to find Jesus the Redeemer of our souls, we are to follow the advice that the Lord was pleased to give them, *not to return any more to Herod, but march forward toward their native country by a different road from that which they had come*. We are not to hold any

farther correspondence with the enemies of Jesus Christ ; we are to take care not to relapse into our former disorders, not to return any more to our past sins, but to begin a new course of life, and make the best of our way to our native home and heavenly country. We are to march on forward toward that happy land of promise, by a quite different road from that by which we have unhappily strayed away from it, and have been blindly led into a long train of errors.

Such, my dear brethren, are the important instructions that the great mystery of this day affords us ; let us not, therefore, receive the grace of God in vain. Let us render a thousand thanks to His infinite mercy for the signal benefit of our vocation to the Christian religion. Let us glorify the ever-blessed Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—for having vouchsafed to distinguish us from pagans and idolators by the light of the Gospel ; from unbelievers, by a submission to His Church ; from abandoned sinners, by the efficacy of His holy Sacraments. Let us devoutly prostrate ourselves before our Divine Redeemer, who humbled Himself so low as to descend from the highest heavens, and to be born in the stable of Bethlehem for our sake. If we have not the *gold* of perfect charity, nor the *frankincense* of an inflamed, and fervent devotion to offer, let us at least present Him with the *myrrh* of a bitter sorrow and compunction for our past offenses. Let us make Him a tender of our hearts, and of the three faculties of our souls, our memory, understanding, and will. Praise, honor, and glory be to Thee for ever, O adorable Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost ! Accept our hearts as a thanksgiving-offering for the numberless favors and blessings we have received from Thy bounty. Thou knowest our poverty, and that we have nothing worthy of Thy acceptance ; nothing but what, on a thousand titles, already belongs to Thee. Thou askest nothing but our heart, and this we most willingly offer to Thee without reserve, and consecrate entirely to Thy service. We offer Thee our memory, that it may be ever recollected in Thee ; our understanding, that it may always be enlightened and directed by Thy truth ; and our will, that it may be ever conformable to Thy divine will. Vouchsafe, we beseech Thee, to guide our steps, that we may henceforward walk in the paths of virtue and the way of Thy precepts, during the course of our mortal pilgrimage here on earth, as by so doing we may hope, through Thy mercy, to be admitted hereafter to the possession of the kingdom of Thy eternal glory. Which I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

ON THE FEAST OF ST. PATRICK, APOSTLE OF IRELAND.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. How God's grace prepared His servants for their mission.
- II. How the holy St. Patrick destroyed the infidelity, vice, and immorality of the pagan Irish.
- III. How St. Patrick established Catholicity and promoted piety in Ireland.
- IV. How sin debases human nature.
- V. Peroration.

Mementote præpositorum vestrorum, qui vobis locuti sunt Verbum Dei—imitamini fidem—doctrinis variis et peregrinis nolite abduci.—Heb. c. xiii. v. 7-9.
Remember your prelates, who have spoken the Word of God to you—whose faith follows—and be not led away with various and strange doctrines.—Heb. c. xiii. v. 7-9.

WHEN the Almighty singles out men to be the extraordinary messengers of His councils, oracles of His wisdom, instruments of His grace, and channels of His boundless mercies, He confers on them those wonderful gifts, talents, and virtues that are requisite to qualify them for the execution of His orders, and for the accomplishment of the grand designs of His all-ruling providence. Thus He qualified Moses, Aaron, and the Prophets in the Old Law, and the twelve Apostles in the New Law, for the solemn embassy and the heavenly commission on which He was pleased to send them. He invested them with every power they stood in need of, in order to discharge the duties of their ministry with success. He communicated to them all the eminent gifts and talents that were necessary, to enable them to encounter the difficulties, and surmount all the obstacles which stood in their way, and which attended the due execution of the high commission they were charged with. Among many other renowned characters and remarkable instances of this truth, we may justly rank St. Patrick, the glorious Apostle and Patron of Ireland, whose feast the Church solemnizes this day, and honors with the privilege of a plenary indulgence, extended to the faithful of the whole kingdom on every day of the ensuing octave. When the Lord in His great goodness singled him out, for the grand work of the conversion of this remote corner of the then known world to the Christian and Catholic religion, when He sent him as an instrument of His divine mercy, to announce the mystery of the cross to our

ancestors, and to enlighten a people, who, as the Scripture phrase expresses it, were sitting in darkness, and in the gloomy shades of death, He qualified him in every respect for the arduous enterprise, and made him at once a most zealous apostle and an illustrious saint, that he might diffuse the light of the Gospel all over this island by his indefatigable zeal, and establish the spirit of the Gospel by his eminent sanctity. It is under these two considerations that I intend to represent St. Patrick to you at present, as a precious vessel of election and model of Christian perfection. He rooted up infidelity, and planted Catholicity in this country; he banished vice and immorality, and promoted the practice of true piety and solid virtue, both by his word and example. Behold the plan of the following discourse, and the subject of your favorable attention. Let us previously invoke the aid of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, greeting her with the words of the angel, &c. *Ave Maria*.

The Scripture informs us that the Saviour of the world retired into a desert, and prepared Himself by prayer, and by a rigorous fast of forty days and forty nights, before He entered upon His mission of preaching the Gospel, and reclaiming sinners from their evil ways. In like manner, the most authentic histories of St. Patrick's life informs us, that this faithful disciple and follower of Jesus Christ our Lord, spent several years in preparing himself by fasting and praying, before he entered upon the sacred functions of the apostolic ministry. That he might preach the Gospel with fruit to others, and draw their souls more effectually to the love and service of God, he first began to preach to himself, to regulate his interior, to cultivate the vineyard of his own soul, and to treasure up lessons of solid piety and true virtue in his mind. Such was the delicacy and tenderness of his conscience, that he accuses himself in his own writings, which are called his *Confession*, that he was rather tardy and remiss in not having begun at an earlier period to love the Lord his God above all things, and with his whole heart, from the very first instant that the use of reason rendered him capable of paying his Creator this tribute, which is so justly due to His Sovereign Majesty on a thousand titles. Hence he tells us, that he could not refrain from weeping for his past neglect, whenever he recollected that his heart had been, even for a single moment, insensible and void of divine love. Herein our Saint imitated the piety of the penitent Augustine, who thought that he could never sufficiently bewail and regret every day, every hour, every minute of his past life, which had

not been filled up with acts of divine love, and who, in order to clear off the long arrears of love, which on account of his former neglect appeared to be still due by him, made it his constant study, ever after, to redouble his love for God all the days of his life, and labored with indefatigable zeal to kindle flames of divine love in the heart of every Christian, crying out for this reason in the fervor of his soul, O Beauty, ever ancient, and ever new ! O Sovereign Good ! O inexhaustible source of all sweetness and perfection ! Too late, too late, alas ! have I begun to love Thee. O that I could begin my course over again, that every moment of my life might be filled with tokens and proofs of my love for Thee, my God and my all ! Behold here an excellent lesson of edification for all, both young and old. Learn, my brethren, from your glorious patron, St. Patrick, that the great precept of charity begins to bind you all at an earlier period than perhaps you imagine. Beware of misplacing your affections on the empty bubbles and painted toys of this transitory life. Look up to heaven, your native country and happy inheritance, which your dear Redeemer has purchased for you with His precious blood ; let your hearts be where God your treasure is, and where He shows His glorious and beautiful majesty to the angels and saints. Begin from this instant, if you have not already begun, to love Him above all things, not by word of mouth only, but in reality and truth from the very bottom of your hearts and souls, and endeavor to increase every day in this divine virtue, which is to be the crown, the joy, and the happiness of the blessed for a never-ending eternity. But to return to St. Patrick. Whilst he was, on a certain day, in the sixteenth year of his age, putting up his fervent prayers to Heaven in a retired place, situated near the borders of the sea, he was surprised by a set of barbarian pirates, who then infested the British coasts, and was suddenly carried off from his family and native country, and brought captive into Ireland, the very land which he was afterward to deliver from the darkness of infidelity, and from the dismal captivity of Satan. Admire here, my brethren, the wonderful ways of Divine Providence ! We read in the book of Genesis that the Patriarch Joseph, by a disposition of Providence, was carried off in his youthful days from his native country, and sold as a slave in Egypt, that he might be the means of relieving the Egyptians afterward in the hour of distress, and supplying both them and his own father's household with the necessities of life, during the continuance of a dreadful famine that raged over that land for the space of seven years.

By a similar disposition of the same Divine Providence, about the decline of the fourth century, the virtuous and pious youth Patrick was stolen away from his parents, carried off and sold as a common slave to a petty prince in the county of Antrim, that, by being inured to hardships, and by being well acquainted with the language and manners of the natives of Ireland, he might be better qualified to undertake the great work of their conversion at a future period, and become the happy means of supplying both them and the churches of his own native country with a sufficient number of zealous clergymen and able missionaries, who would break the heavenly bread of the Word of God to the little ones, and nourish their souls with the food of eternal life in the day of their spiritual famine and distress.

Thus it happened that Patrick, whom Heaven had destined to become one day a great pastor of souls in this island, was previously employed in the low and painful servitude of feeding cattle on mountains, and in forests, where he was for a considerable time constantly exposed to the inclemency of the weather, and to all the rigors of poverty, hunger, and nakedness. Far, however, from repining at his despicable situation, far from murmuring, or complaining of the dispensations of Providence, far from flying in the face of God, as numbers of the distressed and suffering poor of our times unhappily do, whereby they not only lose the merit and reward of their trials and afflictions, but likewise expose themselves to the manifest danger of becoming slaves to Satan hereafter in hell, after having been drudges and slaves to sin in this world; Patrick, I say, far from pursuing so criminal a line of conduct, made a virtue of necessity, and carried his cross, and bore his severe trials with patience and resignation, for the love of his Blessed Redeemer, Jesus Christ. His sufferings of course were to him a source of heavenly benedictions, and served only to furnish him with daily opportunities of practicing the virtues of humility, meekness, obedience, and submission to the holy will of God. Whilst he thus discharged every exterior duty belonging to his state with cheerfulness, and attended the cattle of his earthly master with the vigilance, assiduity, and activity of a faithful servant, his conversation was mostly in Heaven, for he united contemplation with action, and in the midst of his daily employments he took care to elevate his heart frequently to God by pious aspirations, and short, but devout and fervent prayers. It is related in his life, that he was accustomed to adore God on his bended knees no less than a hundred times in the day and in the night, by which means the love

of God continually inflamed his tender heart more and more, and acquired every day new strength in his affectionate soul. It were to be wished, my brethren, that this pious method of attending constantly to the divine presence in the course of the day, and raising up the heart often to God, by some ejaculatory prayer, whilst the hands are employed at daily labor, were more generally adopted by all laborious and industrious Christians in the midst of their ordinary occupations and temporal actions. It is highly recommended by the saints, and was one of the principal exercises whereby they gradually arrived at the height of perfection. St. Francis of Sales advises us to cast ourselves in spirit, at the feet of Jesus, like Mary Magdalen, and to give our souls to God a thousand times in the day. To breathe forth some pious ejaculations now and then costs no great trouble, nor does it require much time, or interrupt our external duties ; it is short and easy, and does not distract or fatigue the mind ; a little practice would render it familiar and habitual, and it has this peculiar advantage, that it can be practiced at all times, and on all occasions, without being exposed to the danger of vainglory, as it may be secretly performed in the closet of the heart.

We have already heard what signal advantages St. Patrick derived from fervent and frequent ejaculations of this kind. No sooner was he released from his bondage than the designs of Providence began to be brought about ; for he felt the strongest impressions from Heaven to set about the glorious work of converting the Irish nation without any further delay. Any other motive than the greater honor and glory of God, could never have induced him to undertake so arduous an enterprise, and so difficult a work, as the general conversion of an entire nation, where vice was authorized by practice, and impiety strengthened by custom. Palladius, indeed, had preceded him, and was the first who formed the plan of converting this nation to Christianity ; but having met with violent opposition, he converted but few, and departed in a short time. The general conversion of Ireland was reserved for St. Patrick, who, having traveled into Gaul and Italy, for the purpose of acquiring a competent stock of sacred learning, chiefly under the tuition of his uncle, St. Martin, the renowned Bishop of Tours, was promoted to holy orders, and received his episcopal consecration and lawful mission from the successor of St. Peter the Apostle, Pope Celestine, in the year of our Lord 431. He did not intrude himself into the ministry without a true vocation. He did not presume to exercise the

sacred functions of the priesthood without being regularly ordained. He did not attempt of his own accord, to dogmatize or turn preacher and teacher, without a proper mission, like unto the false prophets in the Old Law, who, as the Scripture complains, came without being sent, or like unto the new gospelers and fanatics of these latter ages, who are called by our Saviour *wolves in the clothing of sheep*, and who force themselves into the sheepfold without any mission, either *extraordinary* from God, like that of the Apostles mentioned in St. Mark, xvi. 15, or *ordinary* from the pastors of the Church, by the imposition of hands, like that spoken of in the Acts, xvi. and 1 Tim. v. 22, and 2 Tim. i. 6. No, my brethren, St. Patrick came to this part of the world duly called, sent, and authorized to preach the ancient faith, originally taught by the Apostles, to plant the Catholic religion, and to open the fountains of salvation, grace, and mercy to sinners. No sooner did he land at Wicklow, with about twenty fellow-laborers and zealous assistants, than he began to weed, to plant, to water, and cultivate the new vineyard of Christ. But how did he complete his design? He placed his confidence in God, and as he was a man of piety, recollection, and prayer, he possessed the art of converting sinners, of softening their hearts, of subduing all the powers of their souls, and of infusing more virtue into them than a more learned man, with all his empty science and pompous oratory, would be able to do; for though a man of extensive knowledge may argue, convince, and charm others with his eloquence, yet if the spirit of piety be extinguished in his heart, he is no better than a sounding trumpet, though, as St. Paul expresses it, he should speak the language of men and angels. These maxims were the plan of St. Patrick's conduct, and by these means he had the happiness to gain over innumerable proselytes. He appeared with undaunted courage at the general assembly of the kings and states of Ireland, which was held every year at Tara, the residence of the chief king, who was styled the monarch of the whole nation. Here our saint met a great number of the Druids, or heathen priests, and converted many of them. The shining virtues of his exemplary life were more powerful and more persuasive arguments, than the most elegant discourses. It would be an endless task to enumerate all the labors and fatigues he underwent, in the course of sixty-one years, for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. He traveled through all the provinces of Ireland, rooting up vice, and planting virtue wherever he went. Like another Elias, *he burnt with zeal for the Lord God of Hosts* (3 Kings,

xix. 10), so that he might truly say with the Royal Prophet (Ps. lxxviii): *The zeal of thy house hath eaten me up, and has made me pine away.* Nothing gave him more pain than to see the great God offended; nothing gave him more pleasure than to see Him loved, praised, and adored. He bewailed the gross errors of idolatry and superstition, in which he found thousands of the inhabitants of this country enveloped at the time of his arrival; but glory be to God, his sorrow was soon changed into inexpressible joy. The most obdurate hearts were mollified by his instructions; the greatest sinners cast themselves at his feet, and began to deplore their past crimes with tears of bitterness, and numberless multitudes cried out for baptism, and embraced the Roman Catholic and Apostolic faith. In short, he dispersed the darkness of infidelity by the brilliant rays of his sanctity, and by the ardor of zeal and piety he made truth and virtue triumph over error and immorality. It is recorded of him that he founded above three hundred churches, ordained near three thousand priests, consecrated a great number of bishops, and established seven hundred religious houses, wherein thousands of the faithful devoted themselves entirely to the divine service, and aspired to the summit of Christian perfection by a regular observance of the three evangelical counsels, insomuch that this island was deservedly styled the *Island of Saints*, when St. Patrick finished his glorious career in the hundred and twentieth year of his age, and in the four hundred and ninety-third year of our Lord. Nay, during the three succeeding centuries, whilst the greater part of Europe was overspread with inundations of pagan Goths and Vandals, this island was deemed a nursery of piety, a school of virtue, a seminary of learning, and abounded with a long train of illustrious saints, who derived the streams of their sanctity from their great Apostle, St. Patrick, and illumined several parts of the continent with the light of the Gospel, and the splendor of their virtues. It is true, indeed, that in the ninth century Ireland was in its turn infested by successive swarms of heathen barbarians, who made it feel the grievances that followed the invasion of the sanctuary and the demolition of the Roman empire in other countries; but notwithstanding all the various revolutions of nature, the self-same holy Catholic religion, which was planted here by St. Patrick above thirteen hundred years ago, and which was uniformly professed by our pious ancestors ever since, has been carefully transmitted down to us, whole and entire, unchanged and uncorrupted, and is still professed here to this very day in its primitive purity

Are we not then, my brethren, highly indebted to the goodness of God, for having, in His great mercy, called our ancestors from the darkness of infidelity to the wonderful light of faith, by the ministry of St. Patrick, and for having extended the same heavenly gift to us by the ministry of his successors and descendants, in preference to so many thousands in other countries, from whom the true faith of Christ has been withdrawn by a just judgment, and transplanted elsewhere. Have we not reason to thank, praise, and glorify the holy name of the Lord for this particular blessing, this singular favor, this special protection, and visible interference of His Divine Providence? Should we not, as the Apostle recommends in the words of my text, gratefully *remember our prelates, who have spoken the word of God to us?* Should we not be steadfast in *following their faith, and taking care not to be led away with various and strange doctrines?* Should we not be armed against all novelty in religion, and guard against the baneful influence of those dangerous principles which the new philosophers and unbelievers of this age are spreading in these and other neighboring countries? *Pass not beyond the ancient bounds, which thy fathers have set,* says the Holy Ghost—Prov. xxii. 28. *Stand ye on the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, which is the good way, and walk ye in it, and you shall find refreshment for your souls*—Jerem. vi. 16. *Ask thy father, and he will declare to thee, thy elders, and they will tell thee* (Deut. xxxii. 7), *for there is a way that seemeth just to a man, but the ends thereof lead to death* (Prov. xiv. 12), and again, Christ cautions us in the Gospel, *to beware of false prophets, who make their appearance in the clothing of sheep, but inwardly are ravenous wolves*, that come not to feed, but only to fleece and destroy the flock; nay, St. Paul does not hesitate to say (Galat. i. 8), that although an angel should descend from heaven, to preach up any new doctrine contrary to the ancient faith, once delivered to the saints, we ought to look upon him as an anathema.

Away then with those irreligious discourses, pernicious maxims, unchristian ideas, unsanctified notions and noxious tares, which the enemy is endeavoring to sow over the good seed. Let us live up to the dictates and duties of our holy religion, and show the purity of our faith by the purity of our morals, and by a strict observance of the commandments of God and His Church. Let us not forget the example of our holy Patron, but endeavor to render ourselves worthy of his patronage and intercession, by an imitation of his humility, charity,

piety, and zeal. Let us enter into the spirit of this holy quarantine, and go through it in a manner becoming good Christians and Catholics. Let us not pervert those days of grace and salvation into days of wrath and perdition. Let us not resemble pagans and bacchanalians in the celebration of our festivals, by criminal excesses and intemperance in drinking. Nothing is more opposite to the spirit of the Gospel, and to the sanctity of this present season and time of mercy, than the odious and destructive vice of drunkenness, by which this day in particular, above all days in the year, is most shamefully profaned. There is no vice that debases or degrades man more from the honor of human nature, or that reduces him nearer to the low rank, condition, and similitude of the beasts of the field. It robs him of his reason, which is the greatest prerogative of man, and the most excellent of the gifts of nature. It besots his spirits, clouds his understanding, confuses his judgment, and stupifies his mind in such a manner as not to be able to make one serious reflection, or to distinguish a plain from a precipice, or a friend from an enemy. It renders him a reproach to religion, a disgrace to Christianity, unfit for every spiritual duty, and fit for nothing but for the drudgery of Satan. It should, therefore, be carefully avoided at all times as a brutish vice, but more particularly at present, when the Gospel is crying out loudly to us *to watch and pray, to live soberly, justly, and quietly; to crucify the flesh with its lusts, to exhibit our bodies an immaculate and pleasing host to the Lord, and to look well to ourselves, lest perhaps our hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness*—Luke xxi. O merciful Jesus, grant us all the grace of a true conversion. Open the eyes of those who are blindly straying away from the path of salvation, and conduct them into the right way that leads to life everlasting. Grant to the just the great gift of final perseverance, that being rescued from the dangers of this sinful Babylon, they may see and enjoy Thee for a never-ending eternity, in the sacred mansions of heavenly Jerusalem. Which is the felicity that I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

GOOD FRIDAY.

ON THE PASSION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

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| I. Introduction. | IV. Christ on Mount Calvary. |
| II. Christ in the Garden of Olives. | V. A supplication to Jesus for the |
| III. Christ in Jerusalem. | remission of our sins. |

Predicamus Christum crucifixum.—1 Cor. c. i. v. 23.

We preach Christ crucified.—1 Cor. c. i. v. 23.

NATURE, indeed, may teach us to expatiate on the loss of a tender parent, to bewail the death of a faithful friend, to sprinkle the tombs of our ancestors with our tears, and to raise our sorrow in proportion to their merit ; but when we contemplate the death of a God made man, whose sufferings, equal to his goodness, infinitely surpass the force of nature and the reach of imagination, we must allow that tears are feeble emblems of the grief we owe him, and words but empty succors to distress. Yet such is the dolorous mystery which the Church commemorates on this ever memorable day, a mystery that heretofore split the very rocks themselves asunder, that astonished the heavens, confounded hell, called the admiring dead from the grave, frightened day into night, plunged the universe into convulsions, and drew compassion from every spring of life. There is nothing in religion more worthy of our serious consideration, or more capable of inflaming our hearts with the love of God, and inspiring us with a hatred and detestation of our sins, which were the unhappy cause of all the sufferings of the Son of God. Here the Holy of Holies is presented to our view, not in a state of grandeur, power, and majesty, but in the midst of humiliations, ignominies, and torments, charged with the crimes of the world, abandoned by His friends, forsaken and betrayed by His disciples, given up to the rage of His executioners, and sacrificed for the redemption of mankind. Here we see His innocent body torn with deep gashes, streaming with blood, fastened to a disgraceful cross, hanging between heaven and earth, His head crowned with thorns, His mouth drenched with vinegar and gall, His eyes grown dim and drowned in tears, His hands and feet bored with nails, and His side transfixed with a spear. Behold, my dear brethren, the mournful mystery that calls us all this morning to the foot

of the cross. If any theme or subject can challenge or command our hearts and tears, surely this ought, and as it is the strangest event that ever happened, it requires the most profound meditation. Every day should be a Good Friday to a Christian who desires, with St. Paul, to know nothing except Jesus Christ crucified ; but, as St. John Chrysostom says, this day in particular ought to be employed in prayers, sighs, and lamentations ; in pouring out tears of compunction from our eyes, and making suitable returns of love and gratitude from our hearts ; for must not that soul be insensible, that mind inflexible, that heart impenetrable, and harder than brass, that will not relent and be affected at the thoughts of the bloody tragedy that was acted on this day ! How shall I be able to describe it, and to form any design, or establish any order, in a subject where disorder, confusion, and horror reign in every part, and where every thing was carried on to an unspeakable height of excess ! Excess of charity, excess of justice, excess of cruelty. Never was there seen more love on the one hand, never more rage on the other. The one was infinite, the other extreme, and both without example. He that gives life and being to the universe, was crucified by the hands of those who live by His power. The Creator was put to death, and His creatures were the executioners. They exerted their malice to destroy Him, and He made use of their very crimes to save them.

To open this tragic scene, and to describe without art what we ought to deplore without deceit, permit me, my brethren, to conduct you in spirit to the three different stages of our Lord's Passion, in order to give you some idea of what He endured in the Garden of Olives, in the city of Jerusalem, and on the mountain of Calvary, the dismal place of execution, where He consummated His sacrifice, and laid down His life for His flock. Shall we, according to the usual custom, previously invoke the intercession of His most holy Mother, and greet her with the words of the angel, *full of grace, and blessed amongst women* ? Alas ! the cruelty of the Jews rendered Mary, on this mournful occasion, *full of grief, and the most afflicted amongst women*. The cross supplied her place on Good Friday, and carried between its extended arms *the blessed fruit of her womb, Jesus*. It became then the tree of life, the throne of mercy, the instrument of our redemption, and the bed of our dying Father. It is, therefore, to the foot of the cross that the Church sends us at present, to recite devoutly with her in the pious ceremonies of this day, the sacred hymn, *O Crux Ave, &c.*

Our first parents having forfeited their original innocence, and shut the gates of heaven against themselves and their whole posterity by their disobedience, it became necessary that a victim of infinite dignity should be substituted in our place, in order to appease the wrath of God, and to atone, in the rigor of justice, for the offense and injury offered to His infinite majesty by sin. The whole creation was not able to furnish such a victim. Wherefore, when four thousand years had elapsed after the fall of Adam, the Heavens sent down a Redeemer of infinite dignity, the Eternal Son of the living God, Jesus Christ, both God and man—man to be capable of suffering, and God to give an infinite value to His sufferings. He was pleased to choose the small town of Bethlehem for the glory of His nativity, and the great city of Jerusalem for the ignominy of His passion and death. The time which He chose for accomplishing the great work of human redemption was the time that was appointed for the immolation of the Paschal Lamb of the Jews, and the anniversary of the very same day on which the children of Israel had been released from the bondage of Egypt, to denote thereby that He was the true Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world, and to release mankind from the bondage of the infernal Pharaoh, by substituting Himself in the place of the figurative lamb, and offering up to His Eternal Father His sacred body upon the altar of the cross, as a bleeding victim and sacrifice of propitiation. One single drop of His precious blood was sufficient to atone for the sins of a thousand worlds, by reason of the infinite dignity of His divine person; but, as the devout St. Bernard remarks, what was sufficient for our redemption was not sufficient for His boundless charity. *Cum guttâ posset undâ redemit.* He was willing to work a copious redemption, and to wash away the foul stains of our sins with a deluge of blood.

O how truly did the Evangelist say, that *when Jesus loved his own, who were in the world, he loved them unto the end*, and gave them still stronger proofs, and more signal pledges of His love, as He drew nearer to His death. O with what astonishment must the angels have beheld Him prostrate at the feet of His Disciples at His last supper, washing and wiping them with the most profound humility, and afterward bequeathing to His Church, by His last will and testament, the inestimable legacy of His own sacred body and blood, in the venerable sacrament of the Eucharist! Having retired the same evening from Jerusalem with three of the Disciples—Peter, James, and John—to a neighboring village called Gethsemani, He entered into a garden, situated at the

foot of Mount Olivet. Here it was that the conflict began, which ended only on Mount Calvary ; for as the downfall and ruin of mankind had commenced in a garden, it was expedient that the reparation and redemption of mankind should likewise commence in a garden, as St. Peter Chrysologus says. The garden of Eden had been the first theatre of sin ; therefore, by a wise disposition of Providence, the Garden of Olives became the first stage of our Redeemer's passion. There His blessed soul underwent an interior martyrdom, and was drowned in an ocean of sorrows. There His affectionate heart was seized with strange convulsions of grief, and almost torn asunder with fits of sadness. There the joy of angels, and the sweet comforter of all afflicted and distressed souls, was overwhelmed with so heavy a load of affliction that He breathed forth this doleful complaint : *My soul is sorrowful even unto death* ; as if He had said that the anguish of His mind alone was sufficient to put a period to His life, had not the Almighty power of His divinity supported the weakness of His humanity, and reserved Him for undergoing still greater trials. Fainting away under a double conflict, both of mind and body, He prostrated Himself with His face on the ground, and fell into a most painful agony, which caused streams of His blood to gush forth in abundance, and run down in large drops on the earth where He lay. This made St. Ambrose say, that Jesus shed tears of blood for our sake in the garden of Olives, and wept for our sins with as many eyes as He had pores in His sacred body. What chiefly caused this bloody sweat, and preyed most on His loving heart, was the foresight He had of our base ingratitude, and the loss of numberless souls, which He knew would reap no benefit from the remedy that His charity had prepared for all, but frustrate the designs of His mercy, and perish eternally through their own obstinacy and perverseness, in spite of all He was to suffer for their salvation. He likewise set before His eyes in the most lively colors, the treachery of His Disciples, the malice of His enemies, the rage of His executioners, and the violence of the excruciating torments they were preparing for Him ; there was not one thorn of the painful crown which did not already pierce His heart, not one lash of the whips with which He was to be scourged, that did not make Him shudder ; not one buffet or stroke which they were to give Him that did not cover Him with confusion ; all these melancholy reflections assailed His affectionate soul at once, made the deepest impressions on His mind, and raised His sorrow to the very highest degree.

In this dismal situation He betook Himself to prayer, to teach us that prayer is our best and surest resource in time of distress, and a most powerful means to overcome all sorts of temptations. He prayed with humility, fervency, resignation, and perseverance, to set us an example how we are to pray. He addressed His petition to His Heavenly Father three different times before an angel was sent from heaven to comfort Him in His agony, instructing us thereby that the grace which is seemingly refused in the beginning is often granted in the end, and, therefore, that we are not to despond when we do not immediately obtain our requests, but we are to redouble our fervor, and to continue with an unwearied perseverance to strike at the gate of mercy until it be opened to us. In the interim the three Disciples, who had been eyewitnesses of His glorious transfiguration on Mount Thabor, and were now become sad spectators of the infirmities of His human nature in the Garden of Olives, unmindful of His orders, and of their own danger, fell fast asleep, instead of watching and praying, as they had been warned, lest they should yield to temptation. Their sleep, says Eusebius, was a figure of the spiritual lethargy, sloth, and indolence of many Christians of our days, who are so drowsy in their devotions, so tepid and lukewarm in the service of God, and so careless in watching and praying with Jesus, that they justly deserve the same reproach He made to Simon Peter, when He found him asleep with his companions: *Couldst thou not have watched one single hour with me?* Alas! how far more diligent and attentive are the children of darkness in serving their master than the children of light are in serving the living God! Whilst Peter and his companions were sleeping, Judas, the unhappy apostate, was vigilant and active in planning the death of Christ, in concert with the Jewish Priests, Scribes, and Pharisees. Avarice, which was his predominant passion, induced him to sell his Lord and Master sacrilegiously for thirty pieces of silver, then the ordinary price of a common slave; he came to the Garden of Olives in a hostile manner, at the head of an armed multitude, for the wicked purpose of betraying Him with a kiss, which was the signal agreed upon, and which the Saviour of the world received from him with the meekness of a lamb, though, as St. Leo observes, it pierced His heart more cruelly than the spear which opened His side on Mount Calvary. Suetonius, the historian, relates that Julius Cæsar, seeing a troop of armed men come to assassinate him in the Senate House of Rome, and remarking amongst them a particular favorite of his own, by name Brutus, on whom he had

conferred many signal favors, accosted him thus : *Et tu, fili mî, Brute ?* And thou, my son Brutus, what, hast thou turned traitor ? Art thou come to take away the life of thy father, thy friend, and benefactor ? Is it thus that thou requitest my kindness to thee ? It was much after the same manner that Jesus accosted Judas : *My friend*, said He, *what art thou come to do ?* Dost thou intend to betray the Son of Man with a kiss ? Is it thus that thou repayest my love with the blackest ingratitude and the basest perfidiousness ? But all His affectionate and endearing expressions made no impression on the hardened heart of the traitor, which Satan had already taken possession of. No sooner was the fatal signal given than the impious multitude rushed in upon the innocent Jesus, and began to exercise their barbarity upon His sacred person with open violence ; but to manifest His divine power, and to let them see that no human force was able to prevail against Him, without His own free will and consent, our Blessed Saviour first prostrated them with these two words : *Ego sum*—I am ; and made them reel backward, as if they had been thunderstruck. If His humility was then so powerful when He came to be judged, cries out St. Leo, what will His majesty not do when Xc shall come to judge ? How shall the reprobate be able to withstand His thundering voice on the last day, if He then cast His enemies down with two words, before He gave them power to seize on Him ?

Behold your loving Redeemer now in the hands of a furious rabble, armed with swords and clubs. He is dragged inhumanly about midnight from the garden of sorrow and tears to Jerusalem, the second stage of His passion. He enters that ungrateful city, not in triumph, nor in the midst of pious hosannas, as on Palm Sunday, but in the midst of horrid blasphemies and cruel crucifixes, bound with cords like a malefactor, surrounded with guards, forsaken by His friends, abandoned by His Disciples, and left to the mercy of His merciless enemies. O strange vicissitude of human affairs ! How fickle, inconstant and capricious are the praises and applauses of the world ! They who are our friends, and who load us with blessings this day, will perhaps become our enemies to-morrow, and load us with calumnies and maledictions. What a lively representation have we here in the Jews, who in the course of a few days changed their hosannas into crucifixes, of the shameful conduct of those Christians, who one day receive Jesus Christ in the blessed sacrament with the outward appearance of piety and devotion, and five or six days after banish Him out of the temple of their

souls, relapsing into sin, and blaspheming Him with the same lips which were employed shortly before in praising His holy name ! *The Son of God was led like a lamb to the slaughter house, without opening his mouth* ; He was presented before no less than four different judges, Annas, Caiphas, Pilate, and Herod ; the two former were Jews, and the two latter were pagans. False witnesses were suborned, groundless and contradictory charges were brought forward against the Judge of the living and the dead ; He was questioned by Annas, condemned by Caiphas, tortured by Pilate, and mocked by Herod. Caiphas, the high priest, more desirous to convict Him of blasphemy than to learn the truth, conjured Him in the name of the living God to tell if He was the Son of God. Jesus Christ, to remove all pretext of ignorance, and to teach His followers that they must rather expose their lives to the fury of tyrants than dissemble, conceal, or deny their faith when they are judicially questioned, openly declared the truth, though He foresaw that this declaration would be counted blasphemy and cost Him His life. Sentence of death being then most unjustly pronounced against Him by the Sanhedrim, or Grand Council of the Jewish nation, He was left the remainder of the night in the custody of the High Priest's servants, who breaking through all the barriers of decency and moderation, seemed to vie with each other which of them would give Him the grossest abuse and the basest treatment. St. Jerome tells us that one-half of what our Divine Redeemer endured that night, shall not be made known until the day of judgment. They muffled up His eyes with a rag, bantered Him as a mock prophet, spit upon Him with the utmost contempt, and disfigured His divine features with repeated blows. One vile slave among the rest, had the effrontery to raise his polluted hands, and strike the Son of God across the face with great force and vehemence. O ye angels of God, how could you bear such an insult and injury offered to your Creator ! An angel from Heaven stopped the Patriarch Abraham's arm when it was reached out to sacrifice his son Isaac. Oza, a prince of Juda, was instantly struck dead upon the spot, for having stretched out his hand to prevent the Ark of the Covenant from falling to the ground. Jeroboam, King of Israel, having raised his hand to strike a Prophet of the Lord, his hand immediately became motionless, and dried up. And, O ye heavens, be astonished ! the hand, not of a patriarch, a prince, or a king, but of a mean despicable slave, is audaciously lifted up to strike the Son of God on the face, and there is no one to ward off the blow ! He could, indeed,

have ordered fire from heaven, like Elias, to consume the inhuman wretch to ashes ; or like Moses, He could have commanded the earth to open and swallow him up alive. He could have ordered legions of angels to fly to His assistance and destroy all His enemies ; but He chose rather to leave us a shining example of patience and humility. O Christians, let your suffering Jesus be your model and your consolation, whenever you happen to be insulted and abused ; cast your eyes upon this divine pattern of forbearance, and learn from Him to be meek and humble of heart ; learn from Him that true courage does not consist in dueling, revenging affronts, and retaliating injuries, but in bearing them with fortitude for the love of God ; learn, in short, to look upon your enemies as the instruments of God's justice, and to receive adversity, afflictions, and disgraces, as coming from His holy hands, and designed for the good of your souls.

All the aforesaid indignities did not give the Good Shepherd so much concern ; nor affect His compassionate heart so sensibly as the loss of one strayed sheep, the spiritual and eternal death of one soul, the final impenitence of unhappy Judas, who filled up the measure of his iniquities, and sealed his reprobation with despair and self-murder. O good God ! what is man when left to himself ; what is he not capable of, when he is not supported by Thy grace ; into what a dreadful precipice does he not blindly rush, when he hardens his heart against Thy inspirations, rejects Thy calls, and shuts his eyes and ears against the divine light, and the words of eternal life ! Another subject of deep concern for our Divine Redeemer, was the fall of Simon Peter, who denied Him three different times ; but his sin was not the result of a corrupt heart ; it sprung from cowardice and not from malice ; when he should have watched and prayed, he betook himself to sleep, and when he should have shunned the dangerous occasions of sin, he rashly ran into bad company, and began to converse with the wicked servants of Caiphas. The causes of his fall were the same that plunge thousands in our days into criminal disorders, presumption on the one hand, and negligence on the other ; they unhappily imitate Peter in sinning, and deny the Lord their God, at least by their actions, if not by their words, and that a thousand times more grievously than Peter ; yet how seldom do they imitate him in repenting ; though they have no other way to avert the wrath of Heaven, and to escape this dreadful sentence of the Gospel : *He that shall deny me before men, I will also deny him before my Father, who is in heaven*—Matt. x. 33.

Whilst Peter was lamenting his infidelity with floods of tears, Jesus was hurried away in the morning from the Tribunal of Caiphas to the Civil Court of Judicature, that the unjust sentence already pronounced by the High Priest might be ratified and put into execution, by the authority of Pontius Pilate, the Roman President, and Governor of Judea. Pilate was conscious of Christ's innocence, and knowing that the Jewish Priests, Scribes, and Pharisees were much prejudiced and embittered against Him, because He had discovered their hypocrisy, inveighed against their vices, and eclipsed all their glory by the splendor of His miracles, the purity of His doctrine, and the sanctity of His life ; he therefore made some weak efforts to rescue Him out of their hands, and set Him at liberty. He transmitted Him first, out of policy to King Herod, who being offended because Christ made him no answer, and was unwilling to gratify his curiosity by working a miracle in his presence, treated Him with contempt and derision, and sent Him back in a fool's dress, through the public streets, to the Court of Pilate. Pilate and Herod had been at variance until that juncture, but on this occasion they became reconciled, for men who differ from each other in many other respects, will often agree and coincide in opinion when there is a question of rejecting truth and oppressing innocence. Pilate then set Christ in competition with a notorious criminal, called Barabbas, who was in confinement for a murder he had committed ; for as it was customary every year to discharge a prisoner on that day, at the option and request of the people, in memory of the deliverance of their forefathers from the bondage of Egypt, he supposed their choice would fall upon Jesus, their most bountiful benefactor, and that they would undoubtedly give Him the preference before a public malefactor and murderer. *Which of the two, said he, shall I discharge, Barabbas or Jesus?* But the ungrateful populace, spurred on by the Priests, Scribes, and Pharisees, who had resolved at all events to have Jesus put to death, unanimously petitioned in favor of Barabbas, the murderer, crying out to Pilate : *Release Barabbas, and crucify Jesus.* See what malice is capable of when it has taken possession of the soul ! Never did envy appear more virulent, never was injustice more barefaced, never was any choice more preposterous or more unreasonable. You seem to be fired with indignation hereat, and yet, alas ! such is the monstrous choice you make, O sinner, whenever you prefer the gratification of your passions, and the pleasures of sense to the grace and friendship of the Lord your God. By every mortal sin you commit, you cry out as loud

as the Jews : *Release Barabbas, and crucify Jesus* ; nay, as Tertullian says, you give the devil himself the preference before Jesus Christ.

- Pilate at length, being unwilling to gratify the Jews in some measure, set Barabbas at liberty, and wishing at the same time to preserve Jesus from being crucified, ordered Him to be scourged, but unfortunately left the direction of it to a set of men from whom no more mercy was to be expected than from wolves and tigers. No sooner was the order given than it was executed. The innocent Lamb of God was immediately surrounded by a band of blood-thirsty soldiers, armed with the dire instruments of the cruel operation, fury in their eyes, malice in their hearts, and scourges in their hands. He who decks the lilies of the valley, and clothes the universe, was stripped of His garments, and His virgin body was exposed to the view of an insolent rabble ; the hands of Him who created heaven and earth were fastened to a stone pillar, which only came up to His waist, that the scourges might reach His body on every side without the least obstruction ; but if Sampson broke all the cords and bandages of the Philistines with ease, where could the Jews find cords and ropes strong enough to bind the hands of the Son of God ? The Royal Prophet replies, and tells us (Psalm cxviii.), that it was with the ropes and cords of our sins that our dear Redeemer was tied ; it was the bond of His strong love and charity for us that fastened Him to the pillar, says St. Augustine ; without it, all the fetters and bandages of the Jews would have been insufficient. To break the chains of our sins He suffered His hands to be tied, and permitted the executioners to discharge a volley of lashes upon His back, upon His breast, upon His arms, and upon His shoulders ; every stroke they gave Him made a wound, every wound a stream of blood. It was forbidden by the law of Moses (Deut. xxv.) to inflict more than forty lashes on any malefactor ; but with regard to the innocent Jesus, the cruel executioners consulted no other rule but their own rage ; they struck Him without measure, they scourged Him without pity, they tore Him without mercy until they mangled His sacred body, cut His veins and arteries across, and laid open His flesh to the very bones, so as to see and reckon them, as the Royal Prophet speaks—Ps. xxi. Fury could do no more ; envy could desire no more ; yet all this was not enough to glut the malice of His enemies ; they proceeded to a new scene of barbarity, never heard of in the world before ; to add infamy to His sufferings they untied Him from the pillar, now purpled with His gore, and arrayed Him in the formal state of a mock king, as if He was a

false pretender to royalty ; they covered His shoulders with an old cloak instead of a royal robe ; they put a reed in His hand instead of a royal sceptre, and instead of a royal diadem they placed on His head a most painful crown of sharp thorns twisted together, which they pressed and beat down forcibly, in order to make them penetrate the deeper, and drive them, if possible, into His very brains. O, my brethren, what tongue is able to express, what understanding able to comprehend the racking torture which our Redeemer endured from this mock coronation ! I leave yourselves to judge how the points of the thorns, entering in at His forehead, His temples, His eyes, the crown and back of His head, must have caused a shower of blood to gush forth in abundance, and trickle down His neck and His face on every side. Well might He then say with the Prophet : *O, all ye that pass by the way, attend and see if there be any sorrow comparable to mine ?* Yet He bore all His sorrows and all these most excruciating pains with patience, and even with pleasure, in order to purchase for you, and for me, a never fading crown of glory in the kingdom of Heaven. O be Thou a thousand times blessed, O amiable Jesus ! What hast Thou not done for our sake ! How dearly hast Thou paid for our sins ! O do not suffer us to die impenitent, like Judas, and to be eternally lost after all Thou hast done for our salvation. We prostrate ourselves again at the foot of Thy cross, and beseech Thee to cast one glance of Thy merciful eyes on us this day, as Thou didst on Simon Peter, that like him we may sincerely repent and be truly converted. Mollify our hearts, and melt them into tears of compunction, for it is but just that our sins should draw bitter tears from our eyes, and penitential sighs from our hearts, as they have drawn so many streams of blood from Thy veins.

Our Divine Redeemer being reduced to a state capable of melting the heart of a stone, Pilate imagined that the sight of so piteous an object would allay the fury and disarm the hatred of His most inveterate enemies, so far, at least, as to induce them to desist from demanding His crucifixion ; he therefore produced Him to the people, and cried out with a loud voice : *Ecce homo*—Behold the man ; see how He is all rent and mangled, so as scarce to retain the figure of a man ; for you are to observe, that the deluded hypocrites scrupled entering Pilate's hall, because he was a pagan, lest they might thereby be defiled ; like unto many sinners of our days, who stumble at straws and leap over blocks, they were afraid of contracting a legal uncleanness that could

only reach the body, and they were not afraid of polluting their souls with the most heinous of all crimes. They were men, forsooth, of so nice and delicate a conscience, as St. Augustine says ironically of them, that they strained at a gnat and swallowed a camel; they were exact, even to a nicety, in some observances of little or no consequence, whilst they openly violated the most essential duties of justice and charity without remorse, and made no account of murdering the innocent Lamb of God with the two-edged sword of their envenomed tongues. So far were they from relenting, or being excited to compassion by a view of the piteous object which Pilate exhibited to them, that on the contrary the sight of His blood and gaping wounds served only to animate them, like so many tigers, to redouble their tumults and clamors, their shouts and crucifixes. In vain did Pilate expostulate with them on the injustice of shedding innocent blood; in vain also did he attempt to exculpate himself, by washing his hands in their presence, and declaring he would not concur in so horrid a crime. His hands were too deeply imbrued in the innocent blood of Christ for all the water of the ocean to clear him of the guilt he incurred, by acting in direct opposition to the dictates of his conscience, and yielding to the importunities of the Jews, out of human respect, and through a servile fear of incurring the displeasure of the Roman emperor, with which they threatened him. Like several unhappy Christians of this age, who sacrifice their immortal souls for a worldly perishable interest, and give up their pretensions to Heaven for a living here on earth, the unjust and mercenary judge consented at length to the crucifixion and death of the Son of God, in order to secure the lucrative employment which he held under Cæsar. Methinks I now see the city of Jerusalem in an uproar, the streets lined with an insulting mob, and echoing with curses and blasphemies, the mournful procession proceeding from Pilate's court toward the place of execution, and escorted by a guard of soldiers, and a herald proclaiming the sentence. An immense multitude of people were assembled there at that time from all parts, to celebrate the feast of the Passover, yet few or none of them were touched with compassion, except some pious women, who were bathed in tears on beholding the innocent Lamb of God, like another Isaac, loaded with the wood that was to consume His sacrifice, and marking the way to Mount Calvary with drops of His blood. He carried the cross upon His mangled and bleeding shoulders, as the head and model of the elect, teaching us by His example, as well as by His word, that if we have a mind to be happy with Him here-

after, we must take up our cross in this life, and follow Him through the narrow road of penance and mortification. The cross was a light weight for His charity, says St. Augustine, but it must have been a very heavy and insupportable weight for His body, which was then almost exhausted by the great loss of blood He had sustained in the Garden of Olives, and at the court of Pilate. It pressed so hard upon His wounds that He began to sink under the load, and was scarce able to creep along, which His enemies perceiving, and fearing He would expire on the way, before they could enjoy the satisfaction of crucifying Him alive, they drove Him forward and hauled Him along, till at length He arrived, with much difficulty, at the end of His painful journey.

Contemplate your loving Redeemer now, not as a God, shining with flames of glory, as on Mount Thabor, but as a *man of sorrows*, covered with wounds, and grabbing up the mountain of Calvary. The executioners did not even allow Him time to breathe, but hastily dragged off His garments, which being pressed into His wounds by the weight of the cross, and glued to the small remains of flesh that stuck to His bones, must have suddenly dragged the flesh away with them, so that all His former wounds were renewed in an instant and made to bleed afresh; His body was then thrown down on the ground, pulled to and fro, and stretched upon the hard bed of the cross, without any other pillow to support His head but the thorns with which He was crowned; His hands, which sway the sceptre of Heaven, and His feet, which trample upon the powers of hell, were dug and bored with large nails, which being driven into the tender flesh by repeated strokes of the hammer, forced their way through the centre of the nerves and sinews, the veins and arteries, and caused four copious streams of blood to flow from the four great wounds of His hands and feet. Being thus fastened to the cross by the hands and feet, the head of the gibbet was raised with ropes into the air, amidst the loud acclamations and shouts of the populace, and the foot of it was suddenly dropped into a deep pit prepared for the purpose. We may, therefore, naturally conclude, that as the whole weight of His body was then supported by, and continually pressed upon His perforated hands and feet, all these violent pressures, sudden motions and shakings, must have widened His wounds, redoubled His pains, and occasioned a universal torment all over His entire frame, *from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head*, as the Prophet says. There was no part of Him now without its peculiar torment, says St.

Bernard, except His tongue and His heart, and therefore, the one was drenched with vinegar and gall, and the other was pierced with a spear by one of the soldiers, named Longinus. This made the devout St. Bonaventure cry out and say : *O Longinus, why dost thou wound a heart already wounded with the arrows of divine love?* Joab was formerly deemed cruel, for having wounded the heart of Absalom with three spears ; but Longinus, still more cruel, wounded three hearts with one spear—the heart of Jesus, the heart of Mary His Blessed Mother, and the heart of St. John, His beloved Disciple, who were then standing at the foot of the cross, melted into tears, and drowned in an ocean of sorrow. It is easy to conceive that it must have been a most afflicting sight for the dearest of all mothers to behold the dearest of all sons hanging in the most excruciating posture before her eyes, without being able to afford Him the least comfort or relief. The sight of Mary increased the pains of Jesus, and the nails that fastened Jesus to the cross, tore the compassionate bowels, and transfixed the loving heart of Mary. However, the presence of Mary became a copious source of blessings for the faithful in general, as our Divine Redeemer, on that occasion, placed them under the special care and protection of His Blessed Mother, having by His dying words expressly appointed her their spiritual mother, and them her adopted children, when He said to St. John, and in the person of St. John, to all the members of His Church, who were then represented by St. John : *Behold thy mother* ; and again to her : *Behold thy son*. In this dismal situation Jesus hung alive for the space of three long hours between two robbers, one on His right hand, the other on His left.

Behold here a striking representation of what is to happen on the day of judgment, when, as the Gospel tells us, the elect are to be placed on the right hand, and the reprobate on the left hand of the Sovereign Judge ; the former to be invited to the possession of His heavenly kingdom, the latter to be sentenced to unquenchable flames. One of the robbers prayed, repented, and was assured of his salvation with these comfortable words : *This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise*. The other blasphemed, and, as a dreadful warning to all unhappy cursers, swearers, and blasphemers, was suffered to die impenitent in his sins. In one of these two robbers we have a consoling instance of God's boundless mercy, that no sinner should despair, let his crimes be ever so grievous ; in the other we have a terrifying instance of God's rigorous justice, that no sinner should presume to defer

his repentance to the last hour, or rely on the great uncertainty of a death-bed conversion. But let us return to our agonizing Redeemer. Whilst He was thus elevated between heaven and earth, as a mediator between God and man, He preached charity and patience to us from the pulpit of the cross, as St. Augustine speaks, and offered Himself to the justice of His Eternal Father, as a victim of reconciliation for the whole world, imploring mercy and pardon for you and for me, and for all sinners, even for His most implacable enemies: *Father, forgive them*, He said, *for they know not what they do*. The blasphemous reproaches and raileries which they darted at Him, in order to stab His reputation, when they were nonplussed in torturing His body, deserved a thunderbolt; but His prayer disarmed the Divine Justice, it penetrated the heavens swifter than their malice, and pleaded stronger for pardon than their crimes cried out for vengeance. The divine nature beginning at length to withdraw all sensible consolation from His human nature, His senses became like so many windows to let in sorrow, His eyes began to close, His lips turned pale, His breast was contracted, His breath grew short, and He cried out that *He thirsted*; but as St. Augustine says, His thirst was rather a spiritual thirst of our salvation: *Sitis tua salus mea*. He thirsted after your conversion, O sinners. Woe be to you, if, like the Jews, you present Him with the vinegar and gall of sin, instead of the salutary waters of repentance, and the acceptable tears of compunction.

The last lesson He preached from the cross was an instruction to all dying Christians to recommend their departing souls into the hands of their Creator, and to accept of death with an entire conformity and resignation to the divine will; for having fulfilled the law and the prophecies, and consummated all the ancient types and figures, He recommended His blessed soul into the hands of His Heavenly Father, and bowing His head with the most perfect submission and obedience, He laid down His life for our sake.

No sooner did Jesus expire, but all nature sunk into an agony, and its entire frame seemed ready to start from its centre; a dreadful earthquake ensued, which caused one of the philosophers of Athens to cry out and say, that either the God of Nature was suffering, or that the machine of the world was going to be dissolved. The veil of the temple of Jerusalem, which hung before the sanctuary, was rent from top to bottom, to denote that the figures of the Old Law were accomplished, and that the sanctuary of Heaven was now laid open to man-

kind. The sun was eclipsed, and the face of the earth was overspread with darkness ; the rocks burst asunder, and the monuments flew open. The captain of the guards, who assisted at the execution, astonished at such wonders, loudly proclaimed that Jesus was the Son of the living God, and several of the spectators returned home, giving glory to God, and striking their breasts with grief and compassion. And will you, my brethren, be the only part of the creation that will remain insensible ? Will you not pay your dear Redeemer some small tribute of piety and gratitude this day ? Will you refuse to bathe His bleeding wounds with a few penitential tears ? If you do not drop a tear of compassion for your best and dearest friend, will you not weep, at least, for your own crying sins, which were His most cruel executioners, and which made Him bleed in the garden, bleed at the pillar, and bleed on the cross ? The Patriarch Jacob could not forbear bursting into tears, when he beheld the garment of his son Joseph sprinkled with blood ; the people of Rome could not refrain from sighs and lamentations, when the blood-dyed robes of Julius Cæsar were exhibited to their view from the rostrum. O Christians, O children of grace and redemption, lift up your eyes and behold, not the robes of a Cæsar, nor the garment of a Joseph, but a striking figure and lively representation of the sacred humanity of your Blessed Saviour Jesus Christ. View this crucifix, this image and memorial of Him, with true piety. Read this book of the cross, this compendious history of His passion and death with proper attention. Fix the eyes of your soul devoutly on it, and you will see here in miniature all that I have hitherto endeavored to delineate. *Ecce homo*—Behold the *man of sorrows* ; behold how dear your salvation has been to Him ! Rouse all your feelings, and contemplate in spirit the purple streams flowing from His head, from His hands, from His feet, and from His side, to wash away your iniquities. O sinners, see what your sins have done ! See how the King of all Glory has been humbled, to cure your pride and vanity ! O what return will you make Him this day, for His inestimable and unparalleled charity ! Can you be such monsters of ingratitude, as to continue any longer His enemies after such demonstrations of love ? Can you find in your heart to renew His passion, and crucify Him over again, by relapsing into fresh mortal sins ? Forbid it nature ! Forbid it Heaven ! O base, O detestable sin ! What an odious and foul monster must thou be, since thou hast brought my lovely Jesus to the death of the cross !

O Eternal Father, look on the face of Thy beloved Son, and for His sake forgive us our sins. Receive His sufferings in satisfaction for our past transgressions, and preserve us from offending Thee hereafter. We bow down to the ground with the most profound reverence, O amiable Jesus, and adore, thank, and magnify Thee, for all Thou hast done and suffered for our sake. Vouchsafe, we beseech Thee, to give us all Thy blessing on this day of mercy, grace, and salvation; and grant, that after partaking here of the merits of Thy passion and death, we may hereafter partake of the glory of Thy resurrection. Which is the happiness I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

ASCENSION THURSDAY.

ON THE TRIUMPHANT ASCENSION OF OUR LORD.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

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| I. Perpetuity of the Church. | IV. Its effects on us. |
| II. Circumstances of the Ascension. | V. A prayer for Faith, Hope, and |
| III. Its advantages. | Charity. |

Assumptus est in cœlum, et sedet a dexteris Dei.—St. Marc. c. xvi. v. 19.
Jesus was taken up into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God.—

St. Mark, c. xvi. v. 19.

OUR Blessed Redeemer, having accomplished the great work of man's redemption, by sacrificing His life on the altar of the cross, was pleased to remain forty days here on earth after His glorious resurrection; during which time He appeared frequently to His Disciples, and conversed familiarly with them, in order to confirm them in the belief of His resurrection, and to give them every necessary instruction relative to the due performance of the sacred functions of their ministry. The Scripture relates ten different apparitions, the most solemn of which happened on the very day of His triumphant ascension into heaven; for, as St. Paul tells us—1 Cor. xv. 6: *He was then seen by more than five hundred brethren at once.* We do not find that in any of these apparitions, from the day of His resurrection to the day of His ascension, He ever complained once of the cruelty of the Jews, or even made mention of the base treatment He had received from Annas, Caiphas, Pilate and

Herod ; for, as St. Luke informs us, His conversation and discourse regarded only the *kingdom of God*, that is, His Church, which He founded on earth as a spiritual kingdom, that He might reign sovereignly in the hearts of His faithful servants by His grace in this life, and that they may reign eternally with Him hereafter in the kingdom of His glory. He took particular care to instruct His Apostles in the duties of the apostleship, and to expound to them the sense and meaning of the Scriptures. He treated with them about the belief of the chief mysteries of faith, and concerning the administration of the holy sacraments. He gave them the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and empowered them to forgive and retain sins by His authority, to cast out devils, and to work all kinds of miracles in His name. In fine, He commissioned and commanded them to go into the whole world, and to teach and baptize all nations until His second coming on the day of the last and general judgment, promising at the same time that He would always be with them, even unto the end of the world, and, consequently, that He would be with their lawful successors ; it being evident that their successors in office were comprehended in this promise, as the Apostles were not to live always upon earth, for the purpose of teaching and baptizing all nations by themselves in person, and as the Church was not to die with them, but was to stand unto the consummation of ages, and to the end of the world, in spite of all the powers of hell. Our Blessed Saviour having thus, like unto a wise architect, settled the foundations of His Church on a solid basis, and having authorized His Apostles and their successors to govern it, and to hand down the thread of faith to the faithful of all ages and of all nations, He was at length pleased to withdraw His visible presence from the earth, and to go and take possession of that bliss and happiness which was due to His victory over sin and death. Hence the Evangelist says in the words of my text : *Jesus was taken up into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God*. Behold the glorious victory which the Church solemnizes at present with an octave, and which I will explain to you in the following discourse. In the first place, I will briefly describe the principal circumstances of this grand event ; and, in the second, I will point out the signal advantages we derive from it, and the salutary effects it should produce in our hearts. Let us previously invoke the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, greeting her with the words of the angel, *Ave Maria*.

It was on the fortieth day after Easter Sunday, and the tenth before Pentecost, that our Divine Redeemer quitted this sublunary world as to

His visible presence, and mounted up to the kingdom of Heaven. He had previously apprised His disciples of His intention of leaving them, and finding them overwhelmed with a heavy load of grief and affliction at the thoughts of His approaching departure, He vouchsafed to comfort them in the most affectionate manner. He laid before them the expediency of His returning to His Eternal Father, and the advantages that were to accrue to them from His ascension. He assured them that He would not leave them orphans, but would send down the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, to abide with them, and to teach them all truth. He foretold them, that after a little while they should see Him again ; that their hearts should then rejoice, and their joy no one should take from them. After consoling them thus, He led them out of the city of Jerusalem to a neighboring mountain, called Mount Olivet, where, in the presence of upward of five hundred witnesses, He lifted up His sacred hands, and, like a loving Father, He gave them His last blessing. Then leaving the print of His feet in the stone on which He stood, He raised Himself from the top of the Mount into the upper regions of the air, and ascended triumphantly into heaven. On the same spot from which He ascended, a magnificent church was afterward erected in memory of His ascension, by the pious Empress Helen, mother of Constantine the Great, when she traveled into Palestine in search of the holy cross of our Saviour. It was from this place He chose to ascend ; that where He began to be humbled by His passion, there also He might begin to be exalted and to manifest His glory. He ascended as man, both soul and body ; for, as God, He never was absent from heaven, His divinity being always everywhere present at the same time, and filling all places with its immensity. He ascended by His own almighty power, and not by the help of another, like unto the Prophet Elias, who was taken up in a fiery chariot, or like the Prophet Habacuc, and Philip the Deacon, who were raised up into the air, and translated into distant and remote places by the assistance of angels. He ascended in a bright cloud, accompanied with the souls of the holy patriarchs, prophets, and saints of the Old Testament, whom he released from their tedious captivity, and led in triumph with Himself into the kingdom of Heaven. It was with this glorious train that Jesus Christ ascended, according to these words of St. Paul (Ephes. iv. 8), where he says : *Christ ascending on high, he led captivity captive ;* opening for them the gates of heaven, which had been shut against mankind ever since the fall of Adam till that happy day. O, with what raptures of joy, cries out St. Jerome,

did all the angelical powers come forth to meet and welcome the Son of God on the day of his glorious entry into the holy city of Heavenly Jerusalem. The angels were surprised, the archangels were astonished to behold our human nature exalted thus by Him above the choirs of heaven; the Cherubim and Seraphim were in ecstasies to see their King, after gaining a complete victory over hell, sin, and death, taking possession of the realms of everlasting bliss, in an immortal, impassible, and glorified body, that outshone the brightness of a thousand suns. The Disciples, in the meantime standing on Mount Olivet, with their eyes fixed on the cloud which had taken their dear Lord and Master out of their sight, two angels in a human shape, and clothed in white apparel, appeared to them and said : *O men of Galilee* (for they were natives of that country), *why stand ye gazing up to heaven ? This same Jesus who is taken up from ye into heaven, so shall he come as ye have seen him going up into heaven ;* he shall come again at the end of the world in the clouds of heaven, with great power and majesty, preceded by legions of angels ; he shall come then, not as he did in the adorable mystery of the Incarnation, but in quality of Sovereign Judge of the living and the dead, in order to invite his elect to the inheritance of his heavenly kingdom, and to banish all reprobate and impenitent sinners into hell's unquenchable flames.

The Evangelist tells us, that He is at present *seated at the right hand of God the Father* ; not that we are to imagine that God the Father has either a right or a left hand ; for, as God is in Himself an incorporeal being, and a pure spirit, He cannot be supposed to have either hands or feet, so that this is a figurative expression, accommodated to our understanding and manner of speaking. By it is only meant that Jesus Christ, as God, is equal in power and majesty to God the Father, and as man is now exalted above all creatures, to the highest place and to the supreme happiness that His sacred humanity can be raised to in heaven. In like manner, the word *sitteth*, which is made use of by the Evangelist in the Gospel of this day, and by the Apostles in their creed, does not denote any particular situation, attitude, or posture of our Saviour's body in heaven, but signifies that His humanity now enjoys a perfect repose, and is in full possession of the glory of His Eternal Father without being any longer subject, as He was here on earth, to hardships, pains, and sufferings, or liable to the vicissitudes and infirmities of human nature.

However, this repose which He now enjoys in heaven does not hinder

Him from attending to the wants and miseries of poor mortals here on earth, and representing the merits of His passion and death to His Eternal Father in our behalf. Elevated as He is, above the nine choirs of angels, He still watches like a good shepherd over His flock, and takes special care of His beloved spouse, the Holy Catholic Church. He incessantly presides for her as her Supreme Head, and supplies her with a regular succession of visible pastors, bishops, and teachers, whom He guides, assists and animates with His holy spirit, to rule and govern her, that, as St. Paul speaks (Ephes. iv. 13, &c.) : *We may all meet in the unity of faith, and not be tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.* In short, He continues without interruption to provide for the necessities of His church, and to fulfill His promise of abiding with her every day until the end of the world, not only after a spiritual manner by His grace and protection, but verily and indeed, by a real and substantial presence of His precious body and blood, in the blessed sacrament of the Altar. In and by this holy sacrament, and by the other sacraments which he vouchsafed to leave us as so many standing monuments and pledges of His boundless love, the graces of God are communicated to us, and the merits of His passion are daily applied to our souls, according to these words of the Apostle (Ephes. iv. 7) : *Grace is given to every one of us according to the measure of the giving of Christ.*

The mystery of his ascension was prefigured in the Old Law by the High Priest entering into the sanctuary once a year, as a mediator between God and His people, and carrying in his hands the blood of the victims that were immolated for them ; for in like manner Jesus Christ entered into the sanctuary of heaven on the day of his ascension as our Mediator, our High Priest, and Advocate with His Eternal Father, to offer to Him the precious blood which He shed on the altar of the cross for our redemption, and to demand pardon and plead mercy for us with all the powerful eloquence of His five sacred wounds, the marks of which He was pleased to retain in His hands, His feet, and His side. This made St. Paul say (Heb. iv.) : *Since, my brethren, we have a High Priest who penetrated the heavens, and who can always save such as have recourse to God through him, let us go with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy.* In like manner St. John says (1 Ephes. ii.) : *My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin ; but if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the just ; and he is the propitiation for*

our sins, and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. Behold what signal advantages we derive from His ascension ! He prays for us in heaven, as our High Priest, says St. Augustine ; He prays in us there as our Head, and He is there prayed to by us as our God. It is through Him, says St. Paul, that we have access to the Father, and it is through Him that all favors and blessings descend to us. He ascended into heaven in order to prepare a place there for us, as He speaks (John xiv.), and in our name to take possession of those sacred mansions of bliss which He purchased for us at the expense of His life. By withdrawing His visible presence thus from us, He likewise designed to exercise our faith, to corroborate our hope, and to perfect our charity. In the first place, our faith is exercised and rendered more meritorious by believing in Him, although we do not see Him ; for the virtue of faith has for its object things that appear not, or are not seen ; and the Gospel pronounces those *blessed, who believe what they do not see*. Our hope is also corroborated thereby ; for, since the sacred humanity of our Saviour has ascended into heaven, we have just reason to hope that where our Supreme Head is gone before us, we, who are His members, shall likewise ascend one day, in order to be united to Him forever. Hence he says (John xvii. 24) : *Father, I will that where I am, they also whom thou hast given me may be with me, that they may see my glory*. Our charity is likewise increased and perfected by His ascension, because our hearts are thereby detached from the earth, raised above the world, and drawn after our Blessed Redeemer into the kingdom of Heaven, it being just that where *our treasure is*, our God and our all, *there is thy heart also*, as the Gospel says—Matt. vi. 21. Had He remained visible amongst us here below, we would be apt to consider Him only as man, and to love Him with a kind of earthly affection ; our thoughts would be fixed on the contemplation of His humanity, like the Disciples, who, whilst He conversed visibly with them on earth, seemed to judge of Him almost after a human manner ; wherefore He told them (John xvi. 7), that *it was expedient for them that he should go from them*, as their hearts required to be weaned from earthly affections, and as that imperfect love with which they loved Him required to be purified and perfected by divine love at the coming of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost. Before the ascension of Christ, the Disciples were strongly attached to the things of the world, and erroneously imagined that He was to deliver the people of Israel from the yoke of the Roman empire, and to restore

their commonwealth to its ancient splendor, as appears from these words which the two Disciples said to Him after His resurrection, when He appeared to them on their way to the castle of Emmaus : *We were in hopes*, said they, *that Jesus would deliver Israel* ; for the carnal Jews, being accustomed to expound the oracles of the prophets, not in a spiritual, but in a literal sense, of a temporal kingdom, it was a common opinion amongst them that the Messiah was to subdue all the enemies of their nation by the force of arms, and that he was to reign here on earth as a most opulent and most powerful monarch. Hence came the ambitious request of the children of Zebedæus, who wanted to be ranked, the one at the right hand, the other on the left hand of Christ in His kingdom. It was the same mistaken notion that made the Disciples ask our Saviour *at what time he would restore the kingdom of Israel*. The same error was afterward revived by Papias, the disciple of St. John the Evangelist ; it was also supported by the Millenarian heretics, and justly condemned by the Church in the days of St. Damascus, as being contrary to the spirit of the Gospel, and to the doctrine of Christ Himself, who, by His words and actions, openly declared that *His kingdom was not of this world*.

His ascension alone was sufficient to evidence this truth ; for by quitting the earth He gave us clearly to understand that, as St. Paul speaks (Heb. xi.) : *We have no permanent city here below, but we are to seek after a future one* ; that we are created for the enjoyment of a better life, and ought to look upon ourselves as sojourners and travelers here on earth ; that heaven is our native country and happy home, and ought to be the grand object of our desires, the centre of our wishes, and the chief end of all our pursuits. Such were the sentiments that actuated the Disciples after the ascension of Christ ; convinced thereby of the emptiness of all transitory enjoyments, and of the vanity of all sublunary things, they regarded the world as a place of banishment, as a vale of tears, as a dangerous and sinful Babylon, and as a tempestuous ocean full of rocks and quicksands. They considered themselves as exiles, as travelers, as pilgrims from the Lord, as St. Paul expresses it—2 Cor. v. Returning, therefore, from Mount Olivet to Jerusalem, immediately after the ascension of our Lord, they retired from the noise and tumults of the world, and raised their affections to the real and permanent goods of a future state ; they followed their Divine Master into heaven with their hearts, and longed for the happy moment that was to unite them entirely to Him, and to put them in possession of

His eternal kingdom ; they applied themselves unanimously to fervent prayer and to the contemplation of heavenly things, in order to dispose their souls the better for receiving the graces and gifts of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost.

Behold, my brethren, the salutary effects which the ascension of our Lord wrought in their hearts, and which it should likewise work in our hearts. We should endeavor to imitate the Disciples herein, and ascend like them in spirit after Jesus Christ into heaven. We should follow Him with the most ardent desires of our hearts, that, as St. Augustine says (Serm. 175), we may have the happiness to follow Him hereafter in reality with our souls and bodies. We should divest ourselves of all inordinate attachment to the perishable enjoyment of this transitory life, and look down with a generous disdain and contempt on its painted toys, empty bubbles, and deceitful allurements. We should, according to the advice of the Apostles, *relish the things that are above, and not things that are here on earth*. Far from following the example of the children of Israel, who were so strangely infatuated during their captivity in Babylon that they fell in love with their chains and grew fond of their bondage, we should look up to heaven, where Jesus Christ our treasure is, and aspire to that real happiness and endless bliss which He has in store for his faithful servants. *Seek*, says St. Paul (Coloss. iii.), *the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God*, in the splendid company of millions of angels and saints. The Jews, indeed, might be deemed somewhat excusable in their earthly pursuits, and in seeking the perishable things of the world, because heaven was not yet open to them, and because the Old Testament held out temporal blessings and promised worldly rewards to them, as an encouragement to make them observe the laws and ordinances of God ; but Christians can plead no excuse under the New Law of the Gospel, since Christ has thrown open the gates of heaven to them, and holds out a never-fading crown of glory to reward his followers and faithful servants after the toils and labors of this mortal life.

We read in the Book of Genesis that when Jacob understood that his dearly-beloved son was exalted to the highest rank of honor and dignity in the kingdom of Egypt, he conceived the most ardent desire to see and embrace him, and for this purpose undertook a long and painful journey. Should not, my brethren, our hearts be fired with a similar desire of seeing and embracing our dear Redeemer, now exalted to the highest degree of glory, above all the angelic choirs in the king-

dom of Heaven? Should we not, for this end, cheerfully encounter and zealously surmount every difficulty, every obstacle that stands in our way? Should we not long for the happy day that is to rescue us from the miseries of this sinful life, and bless us with the sight of His amiable face? He has marked out to us the course we are to take in order to arrive at this happiness; He has taught us, both by His word and example, the virtues which we are to practice in order to be entitled to the possession of that eternal kingdom to which he most lovingly invites us. If we sincerely wish to ascend after Him, we must follow His footsteps, and bear in ourselves some resemblance of the virtues of his holy life. We must humble ourselves with Him here on earth, if we expect to be exalted with Him hereafter, since *he alone who humbles himself shall be exalted*. We must wash away the foul stains of our sins with the salutary waters of penance, since *nothing that is defiled will be admitted into the holy city of heavenly Jerusalem*. Drunkards, lechers, extortioners, cursers, swearers, and blasphemers are to be eternally excluded from it, according to the express words of the Apostle. Neither pride, nor covetousness, nor any other vice of ours, as St. Augustine speaks, will get admission there, or be suffered to ascend after our Heavenly Physician.

O Divine Jesus, give us grace to remove every obstacle that might disqualify us from partaking of the happy fruits of Thy redemption. Grant that we may have our affection constantly fixed on Thee by a lively faith, a firm hope, and an ardent charity. And as Thou wert pleased to lift up Thy sacred hands on Mount Olivet, and bless Thy Disciples before Thy ascension, so vouchsafe, we beseech Thee, to lift up Thy hands of mercy, and to pour forth Thy blessings on Thy servants assembled here this day in Thy name. Be Thou our Safeguard and Almighty Protector, amidst the many dangers to which we are constantly exposed in this sinful Babylon. Defend us against all the efforts and wiles of Satan, and conduct our souls, under the wings of Thy mercy, to that heavenly kingdom which Thou hast purchased for us by the effusion of Thy sacred blood. Which, my brethren, I heartily wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen*

FIFTEENTH DAY OF AUGUST.

ON THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. Mary's Assumption beyond the privileges of Henoch, Elias, and the children in the fiery furnace.
- II. The reasons for the Assumption.
- III. What does the Assumption consist in?
- IV. Manifold Scriptural illustrations.
- V. Appeal to the Queen of the Heavenly Jerusalem.

Ece enim ex hoc beatam me dicent omnes generationes.—St. Luc. c. i. v. 48.
Henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.—St. Luke, c. i. v. 48.

On this great festival the Church commemorates the happy departure of the Blessed Virgin Mary out of this world, and the day of her translation into the kingdom of Heaven, as being the birthday of her true greatness and glory, the consummation of all the sublime mysteries by which her life was rendered so wonderful, and the crowning of all the eminent virtues which we admire in particular on her other festivals. This mystery is promiscuously called the *Passage, Dormition, and Assumption* of the Mother of God; but whether the assumption was of her soul only, or of her soul and body both together, is not a defined article of faith, nor is it proposed to us to be believed as such. It is, indeed, a very ancient tradition and pious belief, that soon after her death her body was reunited to her blessed soul, and assumed or taken up into heaven by a singular privilege before the general resurrection which is to take place at the end of the world; for if the Almighty dispensed with Henoch and Elias in the general sentence of death at the usual time, and if, on the day of Christ's resurrection, *he raised to life the bodies of several saints*, who made part of his triumphant ascension, when, as St. Paul says, *he led captivity captive*, why may it not be allowed, and piously believed, that the Blessed Mother of God might be likewise exempted from the common decree, and dispensed with to anticipate the time of the general resurrection of the dead at the day of judgment, especially since this privilege is not so particular nor so extraordinary as other privileges and favors bestowed upon her?

Not only the bodies, but even the garments of the three Hebrew children were preserved from being burnt by the flames of the fiery furnace of Babylon. Was it not then becoming that the immaculate body of the Mother of the world's Redeemer should be preserved from being corrupted in the grave, and becoming a prey to devouring worms like the bodies of other mortals? St. Augustine tells us that he could not entertain an idea of the corruption of the body of the Mother of God, and that it would be shocking to express it. *Sentire non valeo, dicere perhorresco*. Several other holy doctors of the Latin and Greek Church are of the same opinion, and do not hesitate to assert that a preservation from the corruption of death, and a speedy assumption to glory, was due to that sacred body of which the Son of God took human flesh.

However, the object of the present festival is still the same, whether this favor was conferred on her or not; for, as we honor the departure of the other saints out of this world, so we have reason to honor the departure of the Blessed Virgin, and to pour forth our souls before the Lord in holy transports of joy, praise, and thanksgiving for the supereminent degree of grace and glory to which His infinite mercy has exalted her. To inspire you with the like sentiments, and to excite your devotion to her, I will endeavor to show you how solid this devotion is in its principles, how salutary in its effects, how acceptable to God and beneficial to mankind, when it is performed according to the spirit of the Church. In the first part you shall see on what this devotion is grounded, and in the second in what it consists. Let us previously implore the light and unction of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of this spotless Virgin, greeting her for this purpose with the angelical salutation, *Ave Maria*.

The devotion which the Catholic Church pays to the Blessed Virgin is so well grounded, both upon reason and religion, that it is amazing how it can be opposed by any who make profession of Christianity; for reason as well as religion teaches us that the friends of God, who have a near and close relation to Him, or who have been elevated by His grace to an eminent degree of perfection, sanctity, and glory, should be honored for His sake, and respected on His account. *Let honor be given*, says St. Paul, *to whom honor is due*—Rom. xiii. 7. The mount whereon Moses stood, and the Decalogue was published, the Sacred Vessels, the Temples, the Churches, the Communion Table, the Books of the Holy Scripture, and the like inanimate things which

are consecrated to the divine service, ought to be respected and revered on God's account, and for the reference they have to Him. St. John the Baptist professed his respect for the latchet of our Saviour's shoes, and the sick woman in the Gospel revered the hem of His garment, and was miraculously cured by touching it with respect. What honor, what respect, and veneration should we not pay then unto that animated Temple of the Holy Ghost, that precious vessel of election, that most distinguished favorite of Heaven and spotless Virgin, who, in preference to all other creatures, was singled out and elevated to the high dignity and eminent rank of Mother of God ! Must we not be deaf to the voice of nature, must we not be prejudiced in the extreme, destitute of true piety, void of gratitude, and of the love of Jesus Christ Himself, if we do not highly honor and respect the Mother that bore Him, and furnished Him with the blood that redeemed us all from the bondage of sin ? Does not the dishonor and disrespect that is shown to the Mother reflect indirectly on the Son ? The Lord Himself *honors his friends exceedingly*, as the Royal Prophet observes—Ps. cxxxviii. 16. The Three Divine Persons of the most adorable Trinity have vouchsafed to honor the Blessed Virgin Mary in a manner that no pure creature was honored ever since or before. God the Father honored her in a most singular manner when he destined, elected, and prepared her for becoming the Mother of His only Son Jesus ; God the Son honored her highly when He descended from heaven, made choice of her for His favorite sanctuary, tabernacle, and dwelling-place, and was pleased to be born of her in the plenitude of time. God the Holy Ghost honored her also, when the Lord of all glory was miraculously conceived in her and clothed with human flesh by the divine and supernatural operation of the Holy Ghost. The Church of God, therefore, being thus authorized by God's own example, and guided by His unerring Spirit, has always held the Blessed Virgin in very high veneration, and has, in all nations and in all ages since the first establishment of Christianity, justly paid her a religious honor and respect ; inferior, indeed, by many degrees to the supreme honor and worship of *Latria*, which is paid to God alone, but superior to the honor that is given to all the princes of the earth, and to all the angels and saints in heaven. Hence it is that so many solemn festivals have been devoted to her in the course of the year, so many cathedral churches throughout Christendom have been dedicated to God under her patronage, so many altars have been erected, so many religious orders and confraternities

have been instituted under the invocation of her name, and so many holy doctors and learned writers of venerable antiquity have, as it were in concert, employed both their tongues and their pens in proclaiming her praises, and in recommending to posterity a true devotion to her, as being not only well grounded and lawful in its own nature, but also as redounding very much to the honor and glory of God, and to the spiritual advantage of the faithful. This extraordinary respect and universal devotion of all ages and nations has been foretold by the Blessed Virgin herself about eighteen hundred years ago, in that celebrated canticle, *Magnificat*, which she pronounced by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost (Luke i.), and in which she expressly prophesied, *that all succeeding generations should call her blessed, because he who is mighty had done great things for her.*

That she should be elevated to the dignity of being the Mother of God, was a most stupendous miracle, and the highest honor, the most transcendent rank to which any pure creature was ever raised. Neither patriarchs nor prophets, nor apostles nor martyrs, nor angels nor arch-angels, nor Cherubim nor Seraphim, nor any of the choirs of blessed spirits who assist continually before the Throne of God, ever approached so near, or were so closely united and allied to the sovereign majesty of God; nay, no pure creature was capable of being elevated to a higher rank, or of bearing a more illustrious title of honor than that of the Mother of God, the Mother of Jesus, our Divine Redeemer. This special favor, this singular prerogative, this supereminent dignity, and of course everything that was suitable to it, was reserved for Mary, and for Mary alone, who, preferably to all other creatures, whether visible or invisible, in heaven or on earth, was chosen to bring forth the Author of Life, to give a Saviour to the world, a victim of reconciliation to sinners, a model to the just, and a new nature to the Son of God. It was by her we received Jesus, and with Jesus everything that is good; it was in her and of her that His adorable body was framed; he took flesh of her flesh, and the precious blood which he offered upon the altar of the cross to His Eternal Father for our ransom was formed of her substance; so that we may say that all the blessings of the Old and New Testaments were concentrated in her, and that mankind is, in some measure, indebted to her for their salvation; since, as St. Augustine remarks, next after her beloved Son Jesus, she has been the principal co-operatrix of human redemption, and the worthiest instrument in the hand of God for crushing the head of the infernal serpent,

and for removing the malediction that was laid on us all in punishment of our transgressions.

However, though the quality and prerogative of the Mother of Jesus, true God and true man, raised her to so eminent and so exalted a degree of honor, yet it must be acknowledged, according to the holy Fathers, that Mary was happier for her virtues than for her privileges, happier for her sanctity than for her dignity, happier in loving the Lord her God, than in having conceived and brought Him forth. God's own honor was interested herein, and required that so close and so near a relation should be embellished with the most exquisite gifts of grace which became her high rank, and Mary's fidelity in corresponding with these graces was the measure of her glory, and rendered her so distinguished a favorite of Heaven, so deserving an object of God's complacency. It was it that qualified her for supporting the glorious title of Mother of God, and exalted her more in His eyes than all the crowns and sceptres of the world could have done. It was her ardent charity, her angelical purity, her conformity to the divine will in the sharpest trials, her meekness, her patience, and her other transcendent virtues, that the Lord considered and chiefly regarded in the recompense He bestowed upon her, as appears from what Christ Himself says—Luke, xi. 28, and Matt. xii. 50.

Her reason was never obscured by any passion, for being always perfectly subject to God, her will was likewise perfectly subject to her reason. No sooner did she know her Creator by the light of faith, but she broke forth into acts of divine love, adoration, praise, and thanksgiving. Her heart took fire in an instant, because God's grace found no resistance in it ; and as God's grace increased in her soul without intermission, because she never ceased to co-operate with it, so her love for God, and all the other exalted virtues and perfections that adorned her soul, received proportionably their gradual improvement, and went on increasing in her during the whole course of her life. Hence the Archangel Gabriel, sent from the Court of Heaven on an embassy to her, saluted her, not by her own name, but with the most glorious title of *full of grace*, as if it were her proper name, assuring her at the same time that she had found favor before God in preference to all her sex. Her modesty was such that she even trembled at the sight of the Archangel, announcing to her, in a human form, the happy tidings of man's approaching redemption. It was not from the distraction of diversions and worldly amusements that he called her aside to deliver his message ;

he found her shut up in her oratory, retired from the dangerous occasions of sin, and wholly occupied in the contemplation of heavenly things. The ground-work and foundation of these and all her other virtues, was her sincere and most profound humility. This was her darling virtue, and it was it that distinguished her, made her so acceptable in the sight of God, and attracted the Son of God from the seat of His glory into her virginal womb. It is, therefore, to this virtue alone that she attributes all the signal favors, graces, and blessings that were bestowed upon her, as appears from the following words of her Canticle : *Because the Lord hath regarded the humility of his handmaid, behold henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.* St. Elizabeth, mother of St. John the Baptist, inspired by the Holy Ghost, called her *blessed among women*, as being the *Mother of the Lord* ; and she was exalted to this high honor and dignity in preference to all others, because of all others she was the most humble. This was the source of all the precious ornaments of divine grace, and of the rich treasures of supernatural virtues that Heaven poured forth into her happy soul with a boundless liberality ; nay, her assumption into the kingdom of Heaven was properly the crown, the recompense, and the triumph of her humility.

Human weakness should desist here, and stop its inquiries in silent raptures of admiration and praise, without presuming to pursue them in an object which was the astonishment of the highest angels in the choirs of the celestial hierarchy. These glorious inhabitants of heavenly Jerusalem might be justly amazed on this occasion, and with reason cry out in the words of the Scripture (Canticle, viii. 5) : *Quæ est ista ? Who is she that cometh up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning upon her beloved, rising like the morning star, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, and terrible as an army set in array ?* (vi. 9), for who can comprehend with what honor Jesus Christ received His most holy Mother into His kingdom, and what measure of glory He bestowed on her ? It is presumption to offer to dive into God's secret mysteries, by pretending to fathom the degrees of bliss to which she is raised. Let it then suffice, that we know her glory is now proportioned to the dignity of Mother of God, which she bears, and to the transcendent degree of grace and merits which she possessed on earth. We justly extol her incomparable dignity in being the Mother of her Creator, a dignity which no mortal tongue can sufficiently describe ; and we may confidently say, that the glory with which Christ crowned her in heaven

is no less above the reach of our understanding. He enriched her here on earth with the most exquisite treasures of grace, when He first chose and exalted her to the supereminent dignity of being His Mother. We cannot, therefore, doubt but He has exalted her by the most excellent gifts of His glory, not only to the third heaven, like St. Paul, but above all the angels and saints ; for, if the Gospel assures us that He abundantly rewards those who, for His sake, serve and relieve the least of His members on earth, we may justly conclude that He displays His liberality with the utmost profusion of great gifts in favor of a Mother the most faithful to His graces, the most fervent in His love, and the most constant in His service. He cannot forget the affectionate piety with which she sanctified herself before she conceived Him, and during the remainder of her life cherished and served Him in His mortal body, and suffered with Him by compassion on Mount Calvary ; and now He pays her by the happiness to which He has raised her, and that in a manner so much the more wonderful, as He is infinite in power, love, and goodness, and as His ways are infinitely exalted above the ways of all His creatures. Hence it is that the following words of St. John, in the Apocalypse (xii. 1), are applied to the mystery of the Blessed Virgin's glorious assumption into heaven : *There appeared a great wonder in heaven ; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.* "The angels and saints," says St. Francis of Sales on this text (1, 3, c. 8), "are here only compared to stars, and the first of those to the fairest of these ; but Mary is fair as the moon, and as easily discerned from the other saints as the sun is from the stars. She is clothed with a glory transcending that of the other blessed, as the brightness of the sun surpasses that of the stars ; wherefore she is said to receive a crown, not like that of the other saints, but a crown of twelve stars is placed upon her head."

The Scripture informs us that King Solomon having placed his mother Bethsabee on a throne at his right hand, desired her to demand whatever favor she pleased, and promised that it should be granted to her, because a son ought to refuse nothing to his mother. Can it be, then, imagined that a Son infinitely grander and holier than Solomon, a Son who never omitted the least duty of a child to his parent, a Son who came not to violate but to fulfill the very last iota, or the least tittle of the law ; can it be imagined, I say, that such a Son will refuse any grace to a Mother so holy, so acceptable, so eminently exalted as the Blessed Virgin Mary ? Even when she was here on earth, her power

of obtaining what she asked was great. A single hint of what she wished for was sufficient to induce our Lord to work a stupenduous miracle to supply the wants of those for whom she prayed. It was at her request He wrought His first miracle at the wedding of Cana, by changing water into wine—John, iv. She interceded then and was heard; Jesus, indeed, observed to her that *his hour was not yet come*, and that what she required was not a thing that belonged to Him as Man, nor to her as His Mother, miracles being a work of the Divinity, in which the glory of God is rather to be attended to than any natural affection. However He granted her request, and began to work miracles before His hour, in order to please her. If, therefore, her prayers were so powerful then, how powerful must they be now that she reigns with Him in the glory of Heaven! What may we not expect from His mercy through her intercession, if we engage her by a true and solid devotion to espouse our cause, and to lift up to the Throne of God in our behalf those pure and spotless hands, which carried our Divine Redeemer here below on earth! Have we not reason to believe and to hope, that our petitions will be more acceptable and more efficacious, when they are backed and supported with her interest, and presented by her unspotted hands, than if we prayed alone by ourselves? She is full of charity, full of mercy, full of compassion, full of zeal for our salvation; she knows that it was for our sake her beloved Son laid down His life on the altar of the cross. By the light of glory, which she now enjoys, she can discover in the divine attributes many secrets that are impenetrable to nature and hidden from us, as she beholds God clearly and intuitively, and not through a dark cloud and mist as we do. She knows and sees our infirmities, wants, and necessities. We cannot doubt of her will to assist us, since her *charity is not evacuated in heaven*, nor any way diminished, but rather perfected and increased, now that she is inseparably united to Him, who is charity itself. Neither can it be supposed that her power is diminished, or that she has lost her interest and credit with her Son, and through Him, with His Heavenly Father. On the contrary, the more she is honored and exalted by Him, the more powerful and the more prevalent her intercession must be; so that as her charity is now more ardent and more perfected, her power also, and interest, must be proportionably much greater than it was on earth, since she is now confirmed in divine grace, raised to a state of bliss, and crowned with glory at the head of the heavenly host. These considerations are more than sufficient to show that the Blessed

Virgin is justly entitled to the special respect and particular veneration of the faithful, and that the devotion which the Church pays her is grounded upon a solid foundation ; we cannot, therefore, with any color of reason, hesitate upon the legality and propriety of it, as will further appear from a few observations on the nature of it. Our holy religion teaches us, that the essential devotion of every Christian consists in the invocation, worship, and adoration of one God, in three Persons, and that as God alone is to be adored and worshiped with divine honor, so He alone is to be prayed to as the giver of all good gifts, and He alone is to be served and trusted in as God and the Creator of all things. To give the supreme honor to any creature, even to the Blessed Virgin herself, would be a gross error, which the Catholic Church is so far from approving or authorizing, that she expressly condemned it in the Collyridian heretics, as St. Epiphanius testifies—T. 3, h. 78. We are sensible that though the Blessed Virgin is the purest of God's creatures, she is still no more than His creature, and consequently, she can grant nothing of herself, nor claim any grace for us in her own right, or independently of the infinite merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the sole mediator of our redemption, and through whose merciful hands all graces and favors must come. It is for this reason that the following conclusion, *Through our Lord Jesus Christ*, is always understood, if not expressly mentioned in all the prayers of the Church, whatever words they may happen to be addressed in, He alone having a just right, through His infinite merits, to obtain from His Eternal Father, whatever He asks for us, or is necessary for conducting us to the happy end of our creation. All our devotion is centered in God, performed on His account, and referred to His honor and glory ; it begins in Him, and terminates in and with Him, as the first cause and last end of all things ; it is to Him we pray and direct our petitions even when we address the Blessed Virgin, invoke her intercession, and entreat her to pray for and with us to our common Lord and Creator. In honoring her, we honor Him, because we honor her for His sake, and for being honored and beloved by Him ; in revering and venerating her we venerate and admire the gifts and graces of God in her person. The honor of God is, therefore, so far from being hurt or diminished thereby, that it is, on the contrary, promoted and increased. It is no dishonor to God to praise Him in His saints, and to call upon His angels to glorify Him as the Scripture frequently does. The more the number of His adorers and humble suppliants is increased, the more He is

honored. Is it not evident that every time we beg of the Blessed Virgin to be a fellow-petitioner with us, we honor Him more, to whom we beseech her to address our prayers, than we honor her, whom we only beg to pray for and with us? It is also evident that this devotion can be no more said to be derogatory or injurious to the mediatorship of Christ, than it was for St. Paul to have recourse to the prayers of the faithful (Rom. xv. 30), or for us to beg the prayers of our brethren here on earth, from an humble sense of our own unworthiness, and from a conviction that the *prayer of the just man prevails much with God*—James, v. 16. The Scripture informs us, that God Himself has at different times sent sinners to saints, that they might intercede for them, and that by this means they have been frequently spared and rescued from the jaws of destruction—Gen. xx. ; Numb. xxi. ; Job, xl. ; Kings, i. vii. viii. What is more, Christ our Lord seems to have recommended this devotion from the pulpit of the cross, by saying : *Behold thy Son ; behold thy Mother* (John, xix. 26, 27), for, as He was pleased, in His great mercy, to raise us to the dignity of being the adoptive children of His Heavenly Father, and His own brethren and co-heirs of His kingdom ; so, by addressing the Blessed Virgin in these words, *Behold thy Son*, meaning St. John, and in his person all the faithful, who were represented by him, he constituted them the spiritual children of his virginal Mother, and placed them under her patronage and protection, that she might look upon them with the tenderness and compassionate bowels of an affectionate mother ; and again, by saying to St. John, and in his person to all the members of the Church, who were represented by Him, *Behold thy Mother*, He gave him and us to understand, that He appointed the Blessed Virgin the spiritual mother of all the faithful, full, and as such, that we are to honor and revere her for His sake with filial piety, respect, and devotion. It cannot be supposed that she forgets these words of her dearly beloved Son, or that she neglects the charge which He thus gave her with His last breath, or that she is no way interested or concerned for our eternal welfare. If the Gospel tells us that the rich man who was buried in hell, whilst poor Lazarus was translated into Abraham's bosom, was so solicitous for the salvation of his five brothers on earth, that he used his best endeavors to prevent their coming into that woeful place of torments, can it be supposed that the blessed Mother of Jesus is less charitable or less zealous in procuring the salvation of those whom He recommended to her care, ransomed with His precious blood, and destined to be one day co-heirs of His

everlasting kingdom ! No, my brethren, Mary is both willing and able to employ her interest with her Beloved Son in our favor, and to succor us in all our necessities. There is no grace but we may hope for from the divine mercy, through her intercession, provided we render ourselves worthy of her patronage by a true and sincere devotion. Such devotion consists not barely in honoring her with our lips, or invoking her intercession by word of mouth ; but, as St. Bernard says, in honoring her with our hearts, and with our deeds and actions ; it consists in following her example, and copying after the virtues of her holy life. It would be an impious presumption to expect to be saved by her intercession without complying with the essential duties of religion, and renouncing those detestable vices which, according to the Apostle, entail damnation on the unhappy offenders. It is in vain to flatter ourselves with the notion that she will patronize or befriend us, merely on account of paying her a daily tribute of a few vocal prayers, if in the interim, we continue to lead a vicious, disorderly, and scandalous course of life, and to crucify Jesus Christ over again by relapsing into mortal sin. She is, indeed, justly styled *the refuge of sinners* ; but she is not the encourager nor the protectrix of incorrigible rebels and libertines, who persist in the habit of trampling upon the commandments of God, and violating the sacred laws of His Church. She is the refuge of sinners, but of repenting sinners, who fly from God's justice to the throne of grace and mercy with contrite and humble hearts.

Accept, O Blessed Virgin, the small mite of my poor endeavors to vindicate thy honor, and promote a true and solid devotion to thee. Hail, O Virgin, *full of grace, and blessed among women* ! May we all experience the salutary effects of thy powerful intercession. Pray for us now, we beseech thee, during the course of our mortal life, but particularly at the last and fatal hour which is to decide our eternal lot ; stand by us then, as thou didst stand by thy Beloved Son, when He expired on the cross ; obtain for us the great gift of final perseverance and the grace of a happy death, that our souls may not become a prey to the malice of Satan, but may be safely conducted into the charming mansions of Heavenly Jerusalem, there to join the angelic choirs in singing the immortal praises of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for a never-ending eternity. Which, my brethren, I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost *Amen.*

ON THE ANGELICAL SALUTATION; OR, THE AVE MARIA, &c.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. How the Angelical Salutation was made.
- II. The meaning of its parts.
- III. In what sense we pray to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Hail, full of Grace.—*St. Luke, c. i. v. 28.*

THIS is the most celebrated prayer that the Church addresses to the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is called the *Ave Maria*, or *Hail Mary*, from the first words with which it begins. It is likewise called the *Angelical Salutation*, because the beginning of it is composed of the words that the Angel Gabriel said to the most holy Virgin, when he brought her the happy tidings concerning the incarnation of the Son of God. It is composed of three parts. The first part was made by the angel; the second part by St. Elizabeth, the mother of St. John the Baptist; the third part by our holy mother the Church. The first part is contained in these words: *Hail Mary, full of grace, our Lord is with thee, &c.* The word *hail* is a word of salutation, congratulating or wishing joy to our blessed Lady, who is called *Mary*, that is, as St. Bernard explains it, a *Sea Star*, because, like a bright star, she guides us through the dangerous sea of this life by the example of her shining virtues, and by her powerful intercession. The angel admires in her the wonderful effects of the divine liberality; he considers her as the greatest object of God's favor, affection, and complacency, and therefore salutes her with the noble title of *Full of grace*; that is, not only exempted from all sin, original and actual, mortal and venial, but also enriched and replenished with faith, hope, charity, humility, obedience, chastity, and all the moral virtues in the most eminent degree, and qualified in every shape for bearing the most illustrious title of honor that Heaven could bestow on any pure creature. The following words of the angel, *our Lord is with thee*, signify that the Lord was with Mary in a manner more intimate, more perfect, more particular, and more divine than He ever was, or will be, with any other creature, as He was with her by a substantial and corporeal

presence, residing personally and really in her, as in His choicest tabernacle for the space of nine months, with His whole divinity and humanity. In this ineffable manner, *the Lord was with Mary*, and with none but Mary. The angel concludes his address thus : *Blessed art thou among women*. These words were first delivered by the angel of the Lord, and afterward repeated by St. Elizabeth, along with the following words, *and blessed is the fruit of thy womb* ; for, as we read in first chapter of St. Luke (28, 42), when the immaculate Virgin went up into the mountainous country of Judea, and entered into the house of her kinswoman Elizabeth, with an intent of visiting her, Elizabeth, inspired by the Holy Ghost, cried out with a loud voice, and said : *Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb*. She was *blessed*, as having been chosen preferably to all other women, for communicating to mankind the source of all good and the ocean of all grace. She was *blessed* above all women, because she received a fullness of grace proportioned to the dignity to which she was chosen. On this account all generations honor her and call her *blessed*, regarding her as the centre in which all the blessings of the Old and New Testaments are drawn together, and as the fertile root of Jesse, which produced that *ever-blessed fruit Jesus*, who redeemed the world with the sacred blood that was formed of her substance. The remainder of this salutation is a pious invocation of the Blessed Virgin's intercession. We call her *holy*, because the angel declared her *full of grace*. We likewise honor her with the glorious title of *Mother of God*, in imitation of St. Elizabeth, who called her the *Mother of the Lord*, when she cried out with astonishment : *Whence this favor to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?* As the Church, therefore, assembled against the Arian heretics in the General Council of Nice, added unto *Gloria Patri*, &c. *Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost*, the words, *as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end, Amen* ; so the same Holy Catholic Church, assembled in the Council of Ephesus, in the year 431, defined against the Nestorian heretics, that our Blessed Lady is the *Mother of God*, and thought proper to conclude the Angelical Salutation with the following words : *Holy Mary*, &c. She is truly the *Mother of God*, not indeed by being Mother of the Divinity, but by being Mother of Jesus Christ, who in one and the same person is true God and true man. In the same sense she is also frequently styled the *Queen of Heaven*, the *Queen of Angels*, the *Mother of Grace*, and the *Mother of Mercy*,

because she is Mother of Him who is the Fountain of all grace and mercy, and the King of heaven.

We are far, however, from paying unto her the honor due to God alone : or from having more confidence in her than in God ; or from imagining her to be more powerful or more merciful than her Son ; for this would be both absurd and blasphemous. But we repose a greater confidence in her prayers than in our own, and believe them to be many degrees better and more acceptable to God than our prayers, as we know her to be a most glorious saint, and ourselves to be unhappy sinners. This humble sense of our own unworthiness makes us have recourse to her intercession, fearing lest our petition be rejected on account of our manifold offenses, and because *we do not ask as we ought*, with the proper and necessary disposition. It is evident, both from the intention of the Church and the nature of our petition, when we recite the Angelical Salutation, or the *Ave Maria*, &c. that it is directed more to the honor of the Son than of the Mother ; it being plain that He is more honored to whom we beg of her to address our prayers, than she whom we only desire to *pray for us*. This is our meaning and intention. We only request the assistance of her prayers, and hope to obtain blessings from God through her intercession. Hereby we acknowledge that God's gifts are not in her hands, but in His own ; and consequently that all favors must come from Him ; that the Blessed Virgin is only a creature and petitioner with us ; that God alone is the Fountain of all good, and the Giver of all gracious gifts and favors. Our prayers, therefore, thus backed by her intercession, may be as truly said to be directed to God, as a petition is directed to the king, when one of his favorite courtiers is requested to deliver or forward it to him by his interest.

ON THE SANCTITY OF THE PRIESTLY CHARACTER, AND THE IMPORTANT DUTIES THEREUNTO ANNEXED.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. Introduction.
- II. A priest must attend to his own sanctification.
- III. A priest must labor for the sanctification of others.
- IV. Peroration.

Attendite vobis, et universo gregi.—Acts, c. xx. v. 28.

Look to yourselves, and to all the flock—Acts, c. xx. v. 28.

Thus spoke St. Paul to the priests of Ephesus, whom he had assembled, in order to animate them by a lively and pathetic exhortation to a faithful compliance with all the duties of their ministry. Permit me, my beloved brethren, to make use of the same words, in order to remind you of the obligations of ecclesiastics, who are destined to edify and instruct the flock of Jesus Christ. They are to labor first for their own sanctification ; for how shall they be able to establish the kingdom of God in others, unless it be established within themselves ! How can they hope to kindle the fire of charity in the breasts of others, if they suffer it to be extinguished in their own breasts ! How can they expect to instruct others well in the great practical truths of religion, if their own hearts be not penetrated with them ! How can they pretend to infuse Christian virtues into the souls of others, if they themselves be unacquainted with them ! And how shall they aspire to their own perfection, if destined by Providence to labor for the salvation of others, they neglect to point out the road to Heaven to those whom they are obliged to conduct to it by their word and good example ! A Priest, an Evangelical Laborer, to discharge the duties of his ministry, ought to be continually attentive to himself, and lead a holy and irreproachable life. *Judgment must begin from the house of God*, says St. Peter—1 Ep. iv. 17. He should look narrowly into his own interior, and preach to himself what he would afterward preach to others. The care of his own soul, and the regulation of his interior, is his first and most essen-

tial obligation : for it will avail him but little to draw others to God unless he labors to sanctify himself, and to treasure up lessons of true virtue in his own mind. In two words, *he is to look well to himself, and to all the flock*, and to keep his thoughts and affections always united to God by interior prayer and meditation, whilst he is active and vigilant in the discharge of every exterior duty that he owes to the public. Behold the entire plan of the following discourse. Let us previously invoke the aid of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin. *Ave Maria.*

Although the sanctity of God, and the grace of Christianity, subject all Christians to an obligation to be holy, yet it must be acknowledged that this duty is more particularly enjoined on the Priests of Jesus Christ, our High Priest and Sovereign Pontiff. Let us hear the great Apostle, in his epistle to the Hebrews (vii. 26), where he explains in a sublime style the grandeur and the sanctity of the Priesthood, and of the sacrifice of the Law of Grace. According to his idea, a Priest is a man holy, innocent, pure, spotless, separated from sinners, elevated above earthly things by the sublimity of his virtues, as well as by the eminence of his character, so as not to stand in need of offering victims to God for the expiation of his own sins, as his ministry obliges him to offer daily for the sins of the people. To show you the obligation all Priests lie under to be holy, I might found the sanctity of the priesthood on the grandeur of its origin ; I might tell you that God, after having chosen among all the nations of the earth the descendants of Abraham to be His favorite people ; after having composed the body of that people of twelve tribes, He chose the particular tribe of Levi as the most holy, to draw from thence the Ministers of His Tabernacle, and made another choice in the same tribe for the priesthood, reserving to Himself alone the choice of the sacrificer who was to offer the victims, and menacing with death all those, who without order and a particular unction would presume to touch the ark or handle the censer. Even after the captivity of Babylon, in the very days of disorder, usurpation, and sacrilege, no one assumed the priesthood but those of the tribe of Levi, which the Lord had chosen to exercise it, and in which He therefore required sanctity, saying expressly in c. xxi. of Leviticus : *Be ye holy, because I the Lord am holy.* The holy unction they received at their ordination, the garments they wore, and the many holy ceremonies by which they were prepared for the sacred functions of their ministry, served to represent and remind them of the virtues with

which their souls were to be adorned—Ps. cxxxi. They were commanded to shun the corruption of the world, to touch nothing that was unclean, and to hold themselves constantly in a state of purity, that they might be qualified to carry the vessels of the Lord (Isaias, lii. 11,) and to immolate the victims which their law prescribed. I might draw from hence a just inference to convince you, that those who exercise the functions of the Christian Priesthood, which are formidable to the very angels themselves, contract an obligation to be holy and pure; for if, in the Mosaic Law, which is only a shadow of the Law of Grace, such sanctity and purity were required by Almighty God in the Levites and Aaronic Priests, what sanctity and purity must be necessary in the Priests of the Evangelical Law! But the types and figures of the Old Law having given way to the reality and truth, and Jesus Christ our *High Priest, according to the order of Melchisedech*, having established a new Priesthood, founded not on a vain genealogy or carnal succession, like that of the Mosaic Law, but on the eternal nativity and the glorious life of Himself risen from the dead, let us seek, in the sanctity of the functions of the Christian Priesthood the necessity and obligation they are under to be holy, who exercise it. What sanctity does not a state require, all the functions of which are so holy and so formidable! What is the employment of a Priest of Jesus Christ! It is a faithful dispensation of all the treasures of the wisdom, of the knowledge, and of the charity of God. It is a continual exercise of His mercy and justice. It is to be the minister of His spiritual power, the dispenser of His word and of His sacred mysteries. It is to reconcile the earth with Heaven, in carrying to the throne of God the prayers and the sighs of men, and bringing down to men the graces and mercies of God. It is to pay to the Almighty the public homage of praise and adoration in the name of the whole Church. It is to judge sinners in the tribunal of penance, to weep bitterly between the porch and the altar, to intercede as a mediator with God for the living and the dead, and obtain their reconciliation and salvation from Him. It is to offer up the tremendous sacrifice and pure oblation of the New Law, to render present on our altars the body of Jesus Christ, and distribute it to the faithful. What innocence, what sanctity do such sacred functions require! Would they not do honor to the angels themselves, and should not the purity of those who exercise them be truly becoming Heaven! Should not their hands, which are daily employed in touching and handling the immaculate flesh of the Son of God be spotless! Should not

their tongues, which are purpled with His sacred blood, be purer than the rays of the sun ! says St. John Chrysostom.

It is not sufficient for the Priests of the New Law to avoid the gross crimes of the world, and march in the way of the commandments ; they should even run in the way of the councils, and advance from virtue to virtue, it being an undoubted maxim, that *not to press forward in a spiritual life, is to fall backward*. It is not enough for them to be good, they ought to proceed gradually from good to better ; their justice ought to abound ; their good works must be more copious ; their sanctity ought to be more than ordinary. It was a conviction hereof that heretofore filled several great saints with a holy fear and religious terror, which made them shun and decline ecclesiastical honors, dignities, and promotions, with no less timidity than they now-a-days are sought for with avidity. Church history informs us that they frequently fled to solitary places, and hid and concealed themselves there, for fear of being forced to consent to their own ordination ; choosing rather to live in obscurity, abjection, and humility in the house of God, than, by being raised to a high state, and undertaking the awful charge and duties of the priestly character, to run the risk of involving others as well as themselves in eternal ruin, and of incurring the terrible punishments which are denounced against those through whose fault and neglect a single soul happens to perish. They believed that it was the same thing to be called to the Christian Priesthood and to sanctity, and that the ministers of Jesus Christ, who offer up His body in the tremendous sacrifice of the altar, ought to live according to His spirit, and imitate His sanctity and perfection. *Their office*, says St. John Chrysostom, *requires a great soul and much courage ; they stand in need of a thousand eyes on every side, that whilst they undertake to convert and reclaim others from sin, they may not suffer themselves to be perverted*. The duties and dangers annexed to their character are proportioned to its pre-eminence and advantages. *Great is their dignity*, says St. Jerome, *but great also is their ruin*, if they dishonor their profession and scandalize the faithful by their disorderly conduct, instead of edifying them by the lustre of their virtues. *They are the salt of the earth and the light of the world ; their lips are the repositories of knowledge*, and the people are to learn the Divine Law from their mouths, because, as the Prophet Malachy speaks (c. ii.), *they are angels of the Lord of Hosts*. *They are the ambassadors of heaven*, as St. Paul calls them, sent not to one city but to the whole world, and

strictly charged to enlighten and guide it by their word and example, and as it were, to season it with the spirit of Christian humility, meekness, and charity. It is incumbent on them to be purified, and to purify others; to be sanctified and to sanctify others; to approach the Lord, and to lead others to Him. *O happy Priests!* cries out St. Augustine, *who thus live up to their sacerdotal character!* *Nothing in this life is more blessed, but at the same time nothing is more dismal in the sight of God, nothing more miserable, nothing more damnable, than when they acquit themselves negligently and without interior spirit.* The more sublime their state is, and the more sacred their functions, the deeper is their fall and the more deplorable is their guilt, when, instead of restraining sin in others they sin themselves, and, by their licentious life and bad example, are an encouragement to others to tread in their footsteps, and fall into the precipice. *Nothing,* says St. Gregory the Great, *can be more prejudicial to the honor of God or to the cause of virtue.* On the last day, Ecclesiastics of this description will be accountable, not only for their own personal sins, but also for the sins of others, whereof they are the unhappy cause, and for the souls of all those whose gifts they abuse, and for whose conversion and salvation they are in no way solicitous. The Scripture denounces several dreadful woes against them, and assures us that *the blood of those who perish through their means will be required at their hands.* *Woe be to ye,* cry out the Prophets Isaias and Ezechiel; *woe be to ye, O Pastors of Israel and Priests of the Lord, who, instead of conducting the people into the paths of truth and justice, by the example of a pure and regular life, lead them into precipices by your scandals, and are like so many nets expanded for the ruin of those who are eye-witnesses to your immoralities.* *O hear the word of the Lord: Are not the flocks fed by the pastors? You fed yourselves, and did not feed my flock. You have not labored to fortify the weak, to heal the sick, to bind up the wounds of the infirm. You have neglected to bring back the strayed sheep, and to go in search of those that were lost, so that my flock has become a prey to the wild beasts of the field, through your fault. Woe, therefore, be to ye, O Pastors of Israel and Priests of the Lord!*

It is then the indispensable duty of Priests and Pastors of the Church to look well to themselves, and to all the flock, as the Apostle speaks, They are styled in Scripture, the Sentinels of Israel, the Fathers of the Faithful, the Shepherds of Souls, the Tillers of the Lord's Vineyard,

and the Ministers of His Word. Hence arises the obligation of preaching the word and instructing the flock ; for how shall the *sheep hear the voice of the shepherd*, if the shepherd does not speak to them ? And what a strict account will the shepherd be called to, if he suffers the sheep to be devoured by the wolf, through his neglect and indolence ! St. Gregory the Great says, that those who are charged with the care of souls, and who, loving their own ease and convenience too much, bury their talents under ground, like the slothful servant in the Gospel, and lead an indolent, inactive life, will be responsible on the day of judgment for the sins which they might and ought to have prevented, and for as many souls under their charge as are lost to Heaven, when they might have easily converted and saved them, by faithfully discharging their ministerial duties.

The good shepherd is ever solicitous for the divine honor, and for the safety and welfare of his flock. He allows himself no repose, when the salvation of a soul is in question, but flies with cheerfulness to the practice of every spiritual work of mercy, in order to co-operate with Jesus Christ in rescuing sinners from the jaws of hell, and peopling the kingdom of Heaven with saints. To co-operate thus with Jesus Christ is, according to St. Denis, *de cœlest. Hierar. c. 3, the most divine of all divine works*, and so meritorious in the sight of God that, as St. Chrysostom teaches us, *to gain over one soul to the Lord is more than to distribute innumerable riches to the poor*. A good Ecclesiastic will, therefore, like St. Paul, look upon the gaining of souls as *his crown and his joy*. Actuated by a pure and disinterested zeal, he never loses sight of the great end of his mission, but is ever attentive to a true sense of the duties annexed to the priestly character, which principally consist in breaking the bread of life to the little ones ; in instructing the ignorant ; in comforting the afflicted ; in visiting, with tenderness and assiduity, the sick ; in relieving, as much as in him lies, the distresses of the indigent ; in reclaiming, after the example of his Heavenly Master, with temper, with gentleness, and with meekness, the stubborn and refractory members ; and in conducting all those under his care in the way of salvation. Nothing can damp his courage in defending the cause of virtue, or make him dissemble the truth. Intent only on the greater glory of God, and desiring nothing more than to please Him, and to plant His love in all hearts, he is guarded against the illusions of a false zeal, which seeks itself and its own interest. He despises the applauses of men, and is equally insensible to their praises

and censures. He unites the prudence of the serpent with the simplicity of the dove, according to the instructions given by Christ our Lord to His disciples. In short, he applies suitable remedies to every spiritual disorder, *preaching the word, urging in season and out of season ; reproving, beseeching, rebuking in all patience and doctrine, as the Apostle recommends—2 Tim. iv.*

A humble Clergyman of middling talents, but of strict integrity, solid piety, and disinterested zeal, will often do more good in this case, and have a more powerful influence to reform the heart of a sinner and infuse virtue into it, than a florid orator, who, with all his erudition and glare of pompous eloquence, is swelled with pride and presumption, and void of all real piety. It is true a man of science and eloquence may argue and convince ; but to convert and reclaim sinners from their evil ways is the privilege of those who are virtuous, zealous and pious. *Those things are hid from the wise and prudent, and revealed to the little ones—Matt. xi. 25.* A Preacher divested of virtue, zeal, and piety, is no more than a *sounding trumpet*, and an empty shadow of an Ecclesiastic, although he *should happen to speak with the tongues of men and angels.* *He is a body without a soul to animate it,* says St. Bonaventure, and resembles a taper placed on a candlestick, which consumes and exhausts its own substance, whilst it diffuses rays of light on every side. Nothing is so eloquent or so persuasive as an exemplary life ; it proves the preacher to be sincere, and stops the mouths of the enemies of truth and virtue. Words alone are empty sounds in the air, says St. Augustine ; but edifying examples are like loud claps of thunder, that strike with an irresistible force. *Verba sonant, exempla tonant.*

Ecclesiastics, who wish to see their labors crowned with success, should edify the faithful by a decency of behavior, sobriety of life and purity of morals, so as to become models of virtue, and *examples of the flock from the heart*, as St. Peter speaks—1 Ep. v. 3. They should be inwardly penetrated with a feeling sense of the great truths which they announce to others. Unless their words be animated, they will not inflame the hearts of their hearers, according to this saying of the poet : *Ardeat orator, qui vult accendere plebem.* They may strike the ears, but will not be able to mollify the hardened heart of the sinner, nor work the conversion of his soul : for it is the language of the heart that speaks to the heart, and possesses the art of softening it, and of subduing all the powers of the soul. However, as this is the work of

the almighty hand of God, His sacred unction and heavenly benediction ought to be humbly implored by frequent and devout prayer; for, as the Apostle speaks (1 Cor. iii.): *Neither he who plants, nor he who waters is anything, but God who gives the increase.*

The heart of a good Ecclesiastic, charged with the care of souls, should resemble the Ark of the Testament, as St. Gregory the Great says. A competent knowledge of the Holy Scripture, and of the Law of God, with the rod of true zeal and the manna of sweetness and affability, should be always deposited therein as the two tables of the Law, the rod of Aaron, and the manna from Heaven, were constantly preserved in the Ark. The charge and direction of souls is, according to St. Gregory Nazianzen, the art of arts, and attended with so many difficulties and dangers, that it requires an ample stock of spiritual knowledge, discernment, meekness, patience, prudence, and circumspection, to qualify a priest for embarking in it. *Ars artium regimen animarum.* St. Thomas of Aquin comprises the necessary qualifications of a spiritual Guide, in these two verses:

*Confessor dulcis, affabilis, atque suavis,
Prudens, discretus, mitis, pius atque benignus*

It is evident, *that if the blind lead the blind, both fall into the pit—* Matt. xv. 14. Those who undertake the arduous and weighty charge of souls, without a sufficient knowledge of the duties thereto annexed, are justly compared to an ignorant physician, who, to the great prejudice of his patients, presumes to practice the art of medicine; and to an unskillful pilot, who rashly undertakes to steer a ship through a dangerous sea, and thereby drowns both himself and the crew intrusted to his care, as St. John Chrysostom observes. Hence the Councils and Canons of the Church, which Ecclesiastics should make it their business to know and observe, frequently inculcate the necessity of employing their vacant hours in instructive lecture, useful study, inward prayer, and recollection; that they may constantly nourish a spirit of fervent piety in their souls, and not be exposed to the danger of being perverted themselves, whilst they undertake the important charge of converting and directing others. Charitable remonstrances, entreaties, tears, and supplications are the most effectual means to gain sinners over, and are, therefore, styled by the Councils, *the only weapons of Clergymen.* It is particularly recommended to them to enforce their instructions and

advice by good example, and by observing a religious gravity and modesty upon all occasions and in all things, and in their dress, their looks, their deportment, their conversation, and in all their jests and actions. What is readily overlooked in others frequently passes as a great fault in a Priest. Frivolous and idle things, in the mouth of the man of the world, pass for trifles, but in the mouth of a Priest they are called blasphemies, as St. Bernard remarks. *Nugæ in ore sæcularis sunt nugæ in ore sacerdotis sunt blasphemie.* His life, says St. Thomas of Aquin, is a clock to which many look up. If the clock goes well, it is not much attended to; but if it goes wrong, it is undervalued and thought little of. The canons condemn an officious and unbecoming intermeddling in temporal matters, as reflecting dishonor on the character and dignity of the priesthood. *No man waging war for God, entangles himself with worldly affairs,* says the Apostle—2 Tim. Epist. ii. The Canons likewise interdict the games of hazard, idle sporting, and the frequenting of theatres, taverns, public-houses, meetings, and assemblies, where intemperance is indulged, and the pomps and vanities of the world are set forth and displayed with their most enticing allurements. *Whosoever will be a friend of this world,* says St. James, *becometh an enemy of God*—iv. 4. Clergymen should not forget, that by their state and profession they are separated from the world, and consecrated to God; consequently that it is incumbent on them to shun such worldly pastimes and idle diversions as may lead them into dissipation and withdraw them from the regular performance of those duties which they owe to God and their neighbor. They are to conduct themselves in the world so as not to be of it, and *to use it as if they used it not*, according to the advice of St. Paul. The contagion of the world, which they have quitted, may be easily contracted by too great a familiarity with it, and its poison may be insensibly imbibed by not keeping at a proper distance from the dangerous occasions of sin. If they have their thoughts constantly wandering abroad, and neglect to watch carefully over their own interior, when they are called on to discharge the exterior duties of their ministry, or obliged to converse with the world, they will run the risk of falling away gradually *from their first fervor*, like the bishop mentioned in ch. ii. of the Apocalypse. The love of God will begin then to languish in their souls; the spirit of piety will be drained out of their hearts; the most sacred functions will be profaned; and at length *it shall be as with the people so with*

the Priest, as the Prophet Isaias speaks (c. xxiv. 2): *Sicut populus, sic sacerdos*. To prevent so dreadful an evil, St. Bernard advises Ecclesiastics not to give themselves up entirely to the care of others, or to worldly conversations, so as to neglect themselves or forget that the salvation of their own souls is their first and most essential obligation. Let them, says this holy doctor, resemble a shell which is replenished within, and overflows without emptying itself, and not be like a conduit or pipe, which evacuates itself continually, without reserving within an ample portion of the salutary waters it conveys abundantly to others. *Concha, non canalis*. When they return from their labors and the ministerial duties of their vocation, let them reserve sufficient time and leisure for holy retirement and self-examination, for mental prayer and private devotion.

Inspire, O Lord, the ministers of Thy altar, and preachers of Thy Divine Word, with a lively sense of their important duties, and with an active zeal to fulfill them to Thy greater honor and glory, to the edification of their respective flocks, and the eternal salvation of their own souls. Remove all scandalous abuses from Thy Church, and give us all grace to become worthy members of so illustrious a body, that we may be for ever united to Thee hereafter in the kingdom of Heaven. Which is the blessing I cordially wish you, my brethren, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen*.

*Mundus non mundus, mundos qui polluit; ergo
Qui sequitur mundum quomodo mundus erit?*

SECOND DAY OF NOVEMBER.

ON THE SUFFERINGS OF THE SOULS IN PURGATORY.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

- I. Introduction.
- II. Exposition of the doctrine and belief.
- III. The motives which should incite us to relieve the souls in Purgatory.
- IV. The means by which we can help them.
- V. A prayer to the Father of Mercies for the suffering souls in Purgatory.

Miseremini mei, miseremini mei, saltem vos amici mei, quia manus Domini tetigit me.—*Job, c. xix. v. 21.*

Have pity on me, have pity on me, at least you my friends, because the hand of the Lord hath touched me.—*Job, c. xix. v. 21.*

WE have reason to thank the Lord for having called us to a religion, whose charity and zeal extends itself beyond the limits of our mortal life, and we should deem ourselves happy in being the children of a Church which, after closing our eyes here below, is solicitous to assist us in the other world. That of our separated brethren thinks no more of her members when she once ceases to see them; her solicitude for them reaches no farther than the grave, and this is but a natural consequence of the innovations made in the ancient faith in the two last centuries; but the Catholic Church, that plaintive dove and beloved spouse of Jesus Christ, does not intermit her sighs and her prayers until she has placed us in the bosom of eternal happiness: her charity embraces all the members of Christ; it maintains a mutual intercourse between them, and engages her to share both the miseries and afflictions, the comforts and blessings of all that are comprised in her communion. Hence, as she is composed of three parts, the triumphant Church in heaven, the militant Church on earth, and the patient or suffering Church in Purgatory, she unites every part of her mystical body, and from the vespers of the present great festival of all the saints in heaven, she celebrates the solemn commemoration of all the souls in Purgatory, that the faithful here on earth, who compose the Church militant, may join unanimously on these days in imploring the intercession and prayers of the saints who compose the Church triumphant, and in praising and glorifying the Lord for their triumphs and crowns,

and that they may in a particular manner solicit the divine mercy in favor of the Church patient, and afford them a share in their alms-deeds, devotion, sacrifices, and other good works, as they are not able in the least to assist themselves, the time of mercy and merit being now over for them, and the *night cometh when no man can work*, as St. John speaks—ix. 4. It is for this reason that these suffering souls address themselves to us, and borrow the voice of the Church, which to express their moans and to excite our compassion cries out to us for them in these words of Job : *Miseremini mei, &c.—Have pity on me, &c.* My present design is to expound the belief and doctrine of the Church concerning Purgatory, and then to lay before you not only the motives that should excite our compassion and engage us to assist the souls of the faithful therein detained, but also the means whereby they may be effectually relieved. Behold the subject and plan of the following discourse. Let us previously implore the divine aid, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, greeting her with the angelical salutation, *Ave Maria*.

The belief of a Purgatory, or of a third and middle state of souls, is an article of faith, grounded not only upon Scripture, but also upon the perpetual tradition and constant practice of all ages and nations since the earliest years of Christianity, as appears from the unanimous testimonies of the holy fathers, the most ancient liturgies, and the most venerable monuments of antiquity both in the Greek and Latin Church. There are no less than six texts in the New Testament to prove the existence of a Purgatory, and the Old Testament is so explicit on this head that nothing can be more conclusive. It is true, indeed, the last sentence in the general judgment only mentions heaven and hell, because these are the two only great receptacles of all men, both good and bad, for all eternity, as there will be no Purgatory after the general judgment. It is also very true of every man at his death, that on whatever side the tree falls on that it shall always lie, whether this text be understood of the body or of the soul ; the doom of the soul is then fixed for ever, either to life everlasting or to eternal damnation, so that in this respect it will find itself always in an unchangeable state, whether it comes to the south or to the north, that is to heaven or to hell. If it departs this life under the guilt of mortal sin, it will ever remain in that state, and eternal torments will be its portion. If it departs in the state of grace, it will likewise remain so, and everlasting bliss will be its inheritance. But this does not exclude a temporary state of pur-

gation before the last judgment for those who die in a state of grace, and who nevertheless, at the hour of their death, are defiled with some lesser blemishes and stains of venial sin, or who have left some part of the debt which they owed to the divine justice uncanceled, on account of something that was wanting in their life-time to the perfection of their repentance ; for St. Paul (1 Cor. iii.), speaking of such Christian souls, whose works have been imperfect and defective, though not to the degree of losing Christ, expressly says, that *they shall be saved, yet so as by fire* ; from whence it follows that they cannot enter immediately into the joy of the Lord, without passing first through a temporary state of purgation, or as the Apostle says, through a fiery trial, that is, through the fire of purgatory, for it is evident that no one can ever be saved who suffers hell fire, since out of hell there is no redemption.

Moreover, the Gospel (Matt. xii. 32,) gives us plainly to understand that some lesser sins may be forgiven in the world to come, according to the remark of St. Augustine, and consequently that there must be a middle state, or a Purgatory, for the relaxation of such sins, as no sin can enter heaven to be forgiven there, and in hell there is no forgiveness. Christ also (St. Matt. v. 26,) mentions a prison and a place of punishment, out of which souls shall be delivered, though not before *they shall have paid the last farthing*, and this place of punishment, according to St. Jerome and St. Cyprian, cannot be understood of any other place than of Purgatory, out of which the souls therein confined are not to be released until they shall have fully satisfied the divine justice for the least venial sin they have committed. Such is God's hatred of the least sin, and such is the opposition which the stain of sin bears to His infinite justice and sanctity, that the smallest fault excludes a soul from heaven so long as it is not blotted out. Nothing which is not perfectly pure, clean, and spotless can stand before Him who is infinite purity and sanctity, and who cannot bear the sight of the least iniquity ; for which reason the Scripture says that *nothing defiled shall enter into the holy city of the heavenly Jerusalem*—Apoc. xxi. 27. Unless, therefore, a Purgatory be admitted for purifying the souls of the faithful departed, it would follow that a just man, who dies suddenly after committing a venial sin, can never enjoy the presence of God, which is inconsistent with the goodness of God, and repugnant to the dictates of reason. It would also follow, that except three classes of Christians, scarce any, if any at all, can ever be admitted

into the kingdom of Heaven ; for except children who die in their baptismal innocence ; secondly, martyrs, who seal their faith with the effusion of their blood ; thirdly, renowned saints and illustrious penitents, who by extraordinary rigors and penitential austerities fully expiate all their faults in this life, there is reason to believe that perhaps not one in ten thousand of the adult depart this life so pure, so spotless, and so perfectly purged from all the dregs of sin, as to be fit to go straight to heaven, and pop immediately into the kingdom of unspotted sanctity, since even in great penitents whose repentance is sincere, there usually remains some satisfaction to be made, or some debt of temporal punishment to be canceled, as appears from several illustrious instances in Holy Writ, such as David, Moses, Aaron, and the Israelites in the wilderness. The very best Christians themselves must acknowledge that they sin daily, and fall by surprise into some venial faults and small offenses, which, if not effaced by condign penance in this world, deserve to be punished in the next by the justice of God. Hence we read of some renowned saints, that they trembled at the thoughts of the dreadful account they were to give God for every idle word and thought, and that from a conviction that every sin, great and small, mortal and venial, is an offense to God, and must be punished, as St. Augustine says, either here or hereafter, either by the voluntary penance of the sinner, or by the vengeance of an angry God ; so that when the sinner neglects or omits punishing himself in this life, and dies without having fully satisfied for his past sins by penitential works, he must of course expect in the next life to feel the severity of divine justice, which will not leave the least sin unpunished, as it will not leave the least good action unrewarded.

As to the particular place of punishment where the justice of God obliges Him thus to detain such souls until their debts are fully discharged, or the kind and quality of torments they suffer, or the manner in which they suffer, nothing has been defined by the Church. However, it is certain, that their pains are beyond all human comprehension. St. Augustine, and other learned fathers and eminent doctors and pastors of the primitive Church, who flourished upward of a thousand years before the Reformation, are of opinion that they suffer a real and material fire like that of hell, which being created merely for an instrument of the divine vengeance, and blown up by the breath of an angry God, has the wonderful virtue of tormenting spirits with the most piercing activity, and causes much more intense, more acute, more violent,

and more grievous pains than whatever we can conceive, imagine, or endure in this world. Our natural fire, compared to the fire of Purgatory, is, according to the aforesaid holy doctor, no more than a painted fire. St. Thomas of Aquin teaches that the same fire torments the damned in hell and the just in Purgatory, and that the least pain in Purgatory exceeds by many degrees the greatest in this life. Represent, therefore, to yourselves the racks, the plummets, the iron combs, the gibbets, the boiling caldrons, the scorpions, the glowing gridirons, and other tortures of the holy martyrs, summed up together, with the most cruel torments that have been ever invented by the most barbarous tyrants, they would all be light and tolerable in comparison to the fire of Purgatory. Such is the idea that the holy fathers give us of the pains which the souls suffer there for the expiation of venial sin, and God alone knows how long many souls may have to suffer there; what is certain is, that the judgments of God are hidden and unsearchable; for which reason St. Paul says (Heb. x. 31): *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.* He searches Jerusalem with a lantern; He discovers defects and blemishes even in His elect, and exacts a satisfaction to the very last farthing. The souls of the holy Patriarchs and Prophets of the Old Law were confined in the prison, called Limbo, some thousands of years, and we know how inexorable the Lord was in punishing His faithful servant Moses for one small offense, how inflexible with regard to David and other penitents, and how rigorously His justice exerted itself in the person of His own Divine Son, whom He did not spare, but delivered up to the most ignominious and most painful death of the cross.

All this should be a warning to you, my brethren, to expiate in time all your sins, both mortal and venial, and to cancel the debts you owe God's justice, by fasting, praying, alms-deeds, and other satisfactory works, whilst the sun of grace and mercy shines. We should endeavor to prevent the rigors of the other world by embracing the rigors of a penitential life in this world. We should study to preserve our souls from the purging flames of the next life, by receiving with patience and resignation the crosses and trials, sicknesses, afflictions, and other hardships that are incident to our respective states; we should bear them in the spirit of penance and humility, as coming from the holy hands of God, and frequently cry out to the Lord with the penitent Augustine, to scourge and afflict our bodies, and to give us our Purgatory here on earth, so as to spare our souls hereafter. And since we know the

ingratitude and ill-nature of the generality of mankind, who think no more of their friends when they disappear from their eyes, we should endeavor not to stand in need of them, but watch over ourselves during this life, that nothing may retard our future happiness when we are dead. For this end we should shun most carefully all faults, even the most light ; we should, according to the Apostle's advice, beware of erecting *wood, hay, or stubble*, that is, venial sins, committed either deliberately, or through negligence, or even such as seem to be the pure effects of human frailty, building on the rich foundation of faith and sanctifying grace, *gold, silver, and precious stones*, that is, spiritual treasures of Christian virtues and perfect works, on which the fire of Purgatory has no power. It is for want of taking these wise precautions, that numberless souls are now sentenced to the purifying flames of Purgatory. O, my brethren, did you but behold this fiery dungeon under your feet, how sweet and agreeable would the name of penance sound in your ears ! Had you but a view of the dreadful torments the souls here endure, your bowels would be moved, your hearts would be affected, and your eyes would stream with tears. They thirst most ardently after the joys of Heaven ; they long impetuously for the happy moment that is to unite them closely to the Lord, and to associate them to the choirs of angels. They are bound with chains which they are not able to break ; they are burning in flames which they cannot extinguish. From the midst of these scorching flames and waves of fire they cry out to you for help ; they beseech you to comfort them in their affliction, to succor them in their distress, to relieve them in their extreme necessity, and to release them from that painful captivity which retards their enjoyment of bliss. O give ear to their sighs and moans, which seems to pierce through the very bowels of the earth. Listen to the mournful entreaties, whereby the Church militant represents each of these souls imploring your assistance : *Miseremini, &c.—Have pity on me, &c.* Were you but allowed to penetrate this dark abyss, perhaps you would distinguish among the rest the voice of a tender parent, of a close relation, of a bosom friend, suffering there for a number of years on your account, and like the poor sick man who, as we read (John v.), lay thirty-eight years at the pond of Jerusalem, destitute of a friend on earth to stretch forth a charitable hand to help him. There are, perhaps, this very instant, many such helpless and friendless objects lying on a bed of fire in the midst of Purgatory, and earnestly craving a spiritual alms from you, that may be thereby delivered from their

torments, and released from the debts which detain them imprisoned. You have it in your power to relieve them, and to procure them their liberty on easy terms. You may rescue them from their devouring flames, by applying to them the benefit of the indulgences which you gain, by offering for their relief a part of your devotions and penitential works, and by paying into the hands of the poor the ransom of the captives you wish to deliver ; for the alms-deeds, fasts, prayers, sacrifices, and suffrages of the living, offered to God for the faithful departed, are powerful and effectual means to discharge them from the debts which they have contracted, God being pleased in His mercy to accept of them in their favor, on account of the *Communion of Saints*, or the mutual participation of good works that subsists between all the members of Christ's mystical body, the Church. Hence it has been the universal practice of the faithful in all ages, since the days of the Apostles, to offer up prayers and supplications for the dead, which is a proof that they held the Catholic doctrine of a middle place, where the faithful departed might be assisted by the suffrages of the living, and that they uniformly believed that all souls do not go straight to heaven or hell, since prayers cannot be any way available to such as die in mortal sin and go to hell ; nor are they wanting to such as are immediately admitted into the kingdom of Heaven. Hence also the Church, exclusive of the other suffrages which are offered up in the course of the year, commands all her clergy, by a special precept, to recite at this season the whole Office of the Dead, and to offer up all their masses, in all parts of the Christian world, for the souls of all the faithful departed. O what consolation is it to us, my brethren, to reflect, that after the dreadful moment of our passage from death to eternity, the entire Church of God will interest itself thus in our favor, and that all the faithful all over the world, even those who do not know us, will be praying with the ministers of the altar for the happy repose of our souls, and laboring for our deliverance ! With what heartfelt satisfaction may we not say with holy Job : *Reposita est hæc spes mea in sinu meo—This hope is lodged in my bosom*. Nay, the people of God, long before the birth of Christ, were accustomed to offer up prayers and sacrifices for the happy repose of the faithful departed, and for their deliverance from the temporal punishment due to their sins. We have an illustrious instance hereof in the second book of Machabees (xii.), where we read that Judas Machabeus, the virtuous High Priest and the chief commander of the Jewish republic, inspired with religious

sentiments, sent twelve thousand drachms of silver to Jerusalem, in order to have a sacrifice offered up in the Temple for the souls of the soldiers who had been slain in battle, being convinced that, as the Scripture says : *It is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be released from their sins.* Christ Himself was willing to serve as a model, and to give us in His own person an idea of the devotion and zeal we should have for the souls in Purgatory ; for, as the Apostles teach us in the creed, *he descended into hell*, that is, into that prison where the souls of the ancient Patriarchs and Prophets were confined, along with the spirits who had been incredulous in the days of Noe. Jesus Christ descended into that prison, in order to comfort them by His presence and deliver them by His power. His example should encourage us to descend in spirit into Purgatory, and to afford the souls in prison there all the relief in our power, by offering up our suffrages to the Lord for their speedy deliverance. By contributing thus to hasten their enjoyment of bliss, we shall not only be the means of sending their souls to heaven to sing the eternal praises of the Lord, in concert with the angelic choirs, but we shall likewise make friends for ourselves in the Court of Heaven ; for the souls delivered by our prayers will not repay our kindness with ingratitude ; they will never forget our charity ; but, like so many powerful advocates and intercessors, they will pray for us in their turn, and employ their interest with the Lord in our behalf. On the contrary, if we be insensible to their wants and deaf to their cries, we will justly deserve to have *the same measure given to us with which we measure unto them.* If we forget them now, God, perhaps, will permit us likewise to be forgotten when it comes to our turn. O Father of mercies and God of all consolation, inspire us with sentiments of charity and compassion for all our distressed and suffering brethren. Have pity, we beseech Thee, in the name and for the sake of Jesus, Thy beloved Son, on the souls of all the faithful departed. Deliver them from the temporal punishment justly due to their past sins. Eternal rest grant them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. Admit them, we pray Thee, into Thy heavenly kingdom, and to a participation of that endless glory for which Thou hast created them. Which I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

ON THE PRECEPTS OF THE CHURCH.

DIVISION OF DISCOURSE.

I. Introduction.

II. Each precept in its order.

Si Ecclesiam non audieret, sit tibi sicut ethnicus et publicanus.—

St. Matt. c. xviii. v. 17.

He that will not hear the Church, let him be to thee as the heathen and publican.—

St. Matt. c. xviii. v. 17.

It is evident from several parts of the Holy Scripture, that the pastors of the Church are authorized by Jesus Christ not only to teach His flock, but also to rule the Church, and prescribe spiritual ordinances, laws, precepts, and regulations in matters concerning religion, which the faithful are bound in conscience to obey, under pain of falling into a grievous sin, if they willfully transgress them out of contempt, or in a weighty matter. *He that hears you hears me, and he that despises you despises me*, says Christ Himself to the pastors of His Church, in the persons of His Apostles—Luke x. 16. Hence St. Paul went through Syria and Silicia, *commanding the faithful to keep the precepts of the Apostles, and the Ancients*—Acts xv. 41. *Obey your prelates*, says He (Heb. xiii. 17), *and be subject to them, for they watch, as being to render an account of your souls*. And again, speaking to the chief pastors of the Church at Ephesus: *Take heed to yourselves, and to the whole flock, wherein the Holy Ghost hath placed you Bishops, to rule the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood*—Acts xx. 28. Besides various rules and canons, which regard the particular state of Ecclesiastics, there are six general precepts which regard the universal Church and bind all its members without exception. These precepts appear to be immemorial customs practiced, as to the substance, since the very first ages of Christianity, handed down by Apostolic tradition, and at length reduced into precepts, as being means highly conducive to salvation, and necessary for keeping the faithful in virtuous discipline. The duties enjoined by them are for the most part duties which God Himself demands from us. The Church only determines the particular time, place, and manner in which we are to put them in execution.

The first precept is, *to hear Mass on Sundays and solemn Holydays*,

and to rest from servile work. We are hereby commanded to set apart certain portions of our time for the service of God and the concerns of our souls, and employ them in the spiritual exercises of piety and devotion, lest left to ourselves we should neglect them entirely. Besides the weekly Sabbath, God Himself ordained in the Old Law, several great festivals to be observed religiously in the course of the year, in memory of, and in thanksgiving for the great temporal benefits He bestowed on the people of Israel—Levit. xxiii., Numb. xxviii., xxix. He forbids servile works on these festivals, and commanded them to be kept holy with the same strictness that the Sabbath itself was to be observed, by offering up sacrifices of adoration and praise to His holy name. In like manner the Holy Catholic Church, following the example of God Himself, and authorized by her divine spouse Jesus Christ, has ordained, besides the weekly Christian Sabbath, which is kept on Sunday, the first day of the week, instead of Saturday, the seventh day, several Holydays to be religiously observed in the New Law, in memory of and in thanksgiving for the different mysteries and great spiritual benefits of our redemption, which are annually commemorated on these days. All unnecessary servile works are forbidden on them, that we may have nothing to take off our attention from God's service and the sanctification of our souls. We are commanded in particular to assist at the holy sacrifice of the Mass with great attention and devotion, this being the most solemn act of religious worship, and one of the most essential duties of a Christian. But as this alone is not sufficient to sanctify the Sundays and Holydays, the other pious exercises which are required that we may be truly said to keep these days holy, are left to our own private devotion, that every one may choose such spiritual exercises as are fittest and most proper for himself.

The second precept of the Church is : *To fast the Lent, the Ember days and the Vigils, and to abstain from flesh meat on Fridays and Saturdays, and the Rogation days.* Fasting and abstinence, when observed in obedience to proper authority, and for a good and, through a motive of self-denial and mortification, are most agreeable to the dictates of religion, and contribute to sanctify the soul and unite it to God. They are a general obligation laid upon us by God Himself, and required as a condition, with which our repentance ought to be accompanied, in order to please Him, but the particular time and manner of fasting were left to be determined by the Church, according to the various circumstances of times and places, and the changeable constitu-

tions of the faithful. The chief intent of fasting and abstinence is to do penance for our past sins, to vanquish the temptations of the devil, to curb and restrain our passions, and to mortify the body, by refraining from what is more nourishing and more agreeable to flesh and blood. These are the motives the Church has for commanding her children to fast. She allows the free use of every sort of meat as good in itself and proper to be taken on every day, except at penitential seasons, and on certain days of humiliation, which she has prudently commanded and determined, because otherwise the faithful, if left entirely to themselves, would be apt to neglect this salutary and necessary duty. If she, therefore, forbids the use of certain meats on these days and times, it is not out of superstition, but through a spirit of self-denial. She does not look upon any meats, in the New Law, to be unclean more one day than another, or to defile the soul of him who eats them without previously washing his hands, as the Pharisees superstitiously imagined. Neither does she believe any meats to come from an evil principle, or to be evil in themselves and unlawful to be used at any time, as the Manicheans, Marcionites, and other heretics taught, who are therefore justly reprehended by St. Paul—1 Tim. iv. 3. Such impious doctrines have always been condemned by the Church, which, like the Apostle, firmly holds and teaches that every *creature of God is good in itself*, and all meats which He has created, and *which are publicly sold in the shambles, ought to be received and eaten with thanksgiving*, and without asking any questions, or making a scrupulous inquiry whether they had been offered to idols or not—1 Cor. x. 25.

The times prescribed by the Church for fasting and abstinence are the forty days of Lent, the Ember days or Quarter Tenses, the Vigils or Eves of the principal solemnities, and the Wednesdays and Fridays in Advent. The days of abstinence only, are the Rogation days, and all the Fridays and Saturdays in the course of the year. The general rule and manner of fasting at present is easy, when compared to the ancient practice of the primitive ages, when one meal only was allowed in the four and twenty hours, and that not until the evening, as St. Basil informs us. On fasting days they abstained not only from flesh, and from every thing made of flesh, such as broths and jellies, but also from all white meats that come from flesh, such as eggs, milk, butter and cheese, and likewise from wine. In the present age the general rule of abstinence is to refrain from flesh meat and broths on

the prohibited days out of Lent, and in Lent and other fasting days to abstain from flesh and broths, and to take only one full meal of fasting fare in the day, and that not before mid-day ; but a small collation is allowed at night, as a moderate support to the weakness of nature till next day. If we take a view of the whole history of religion, we shall find that fasting and abstinence have been practiced by the servants of God both in the Old and New Law. Abstinence began first in the earthly Paradise, and was enjoined on our first parents. When Noah came out of the ark, God gave him leave to eat animal food, but expressly commanded him to abstain from flesh with blood. He ordered the Israelites to abstain from leavened bread during the eight days of the solemnity of the Passover. In the Mosaic Law He laid a strict command on all His people to observe a perpetual abstinence from several of the most delicate kinds of animal food, and declared that *the eating of them would defile their souls, and render them unclean*—Levit. xi. 43. Fasting was practiced by Moses, Elias, Daniel, David, the Prophets, the Priests, the Nazarites, the Ninivites, &c., and the Almighty, by the Prophet Joel (ii. 12), calls upon the people *to turn to him with all their heart, in fasting, weeping, and mourning*. We read also (2 Machab. vi. vii. 18, 30), that the venerable old Eleazer and the seven brothers Machabees, with their mother, suffered the most cruel torments rather than break the command of abstinence and eat meat forbidden by their Law. Abstinence and fasting are likewise authorized in the New Testament. Fasting is recommended by the doctrine and example of Christ Himself, who has laid down rules in the Gospel concerning the intention of fasting—Matt. vi. 17. He praised His precursor, John the Baptist, for his abstinence, and foretold that His Apostles and all good Christians should fast after the bridegroom would be taken from them, that is, after His Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension—Matt. ix. 15. The Acts of the Apostles informs us, that *they ministered to the Lord and fasted*—Acts xiii. *When they had ordained Priests in every Church, they prayed, with fasting* (Acts. xiv., xxii., and Acts xv. 29), being assembled in Council they gave an express precept of abstinence to the new converted Gentiles, and declared that this precept was dictated *by the Holy Ghost*.

The third precept of the Church regards *Sacramental Confession*, and the fourth the *Paschal Communion*, or the receiving of the blessed

Eucharist at least once a year, at Easter, or thereabouts. The design of these two precepts is to direct us and fix the particular time, when we are obliged to obey the general command that our Lord Jesus Christ has given to the faithful, who are come to the years of discretion, to approach the sacred tribunal of penance, and to receive the adorable mysteries of His precious body and blood in the most holy sacrament of the Altar.

The fifth precept of the Church is, *to pay tithes*, or what is customary, *to our pastors*. The design of this precept is to direct the faithful in discharging the natural and divine obligation they lie under to supply the temporal necessities, and contribute toward the decent support of their pastors and spiritual guides, who dedicate their whole time and labor to the spiritual good of our souls; for, as they are strictly forbidden to follow any worldly business, trade, or employment, lest it might hinder them from attending to the spiritual duties which they owe to God and to their neighbor, they are justly entitled to a competent support and livelihood from the people, for whose salvation they are bound to labor both night and day. *The laborer is worthy of his hire*, says the Apostle—1 Tim. v. And again, 1 Cor. ix.: *They who serve the altar should partake with the altar, and they who preach the Gospel should live by the Gospel*. In places where the Catholic religion is not at present the established religion of the country, the ministers of the altar and the preachers of the Gospel, studying the salvation of souls more than their own worldly convenience, and seeking rather to feed than to fleece the flock, are content with the free offerings and voluntary benefactions of the faithful, instead of tithes.

The sixth precept of the Church is: *Not to solemnize marriage on the times forbidden, nor clandestinely, nor within the forbidden degrees of kindred*. The times in which it is forbidden to solemnize marriage, are from the first Sunday of Advent to Epiphany, and from Ash Wednesday to Low Sunday, both included. The reason why the solemnizing of marriage with feasting, drinking, and dancing is forbidden in Advent and Lent, is because these things, which generally accompany the solemnizing of marriage, are inconsistent with the spirit of these holy times, which are set apart for humiliation, penance, and prayer. The Church, in forbidding or annulling marriages between those who are related in blood and connected by affinity, only enforces the general dictates of God and nature, and determines the particular

degrees to which this prohibition is extended, and within which any marriage contracted, without a dispensation, is null and void in the sight of God. These degrees reach as far as the fourth degree of kindred and of affinity from a lawful marriage. By means of these impediments, marriage connections are extended to a greater distance from blood relations, and different families are the more united in the bonds of human society and Christian charity. As to clandestine marriages, contracted before persons commonly called *couple-beggars*, they are, for many weighty reasons, held in utter abhorrence by the Church, and the parties thus contracting, the witnesses, and all the assistants, actually incur the sentence of ex-communication by the very fact.

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